

INDEPENDENT

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Win a Lotus Elise

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SEARCHING

Strig's Gansie recalls the last day of his life

BEARD

Stockhausen meets techno kids

Bailiffs will enforce curb on benefits

Anger at Lilley plan to use private debt collectors

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

EXCLUSIVE

Government ministers are planning to hire private firms of bailiffs to enforce a crackdown on abuses of the social security benefits system.

Internal government documents leaked to the *Independent* reveal that Peter Lilley, the Secretary of State for Social Security, is considering employing commercial debt recovery agents to go on to housing estates and demand the return of hundreds of millions of pounds mistakenly paid each year by his officials.

In what will be one of the most politically sensitive contracting out exercises to date, the private-sector debt enforcers will be asked to visit claimants and demand the return of the Department of Social Security's money. The bailiffs will be supplied with confidential personal details about claimants and will be expected to collect the money door to door.

Two firms will be selected for a pilot project and asked to deal with 7,500 cases, around 5 per cent of the annual total, from across the country. They will be given access to personal data on the claimants thought to have received too much money.

This will be the first time commercial debt recovery specialists have been used by the Government in this way. The move comes against increasing demands from within the Tory party to clamp down on social security abuses and complaints that not enough was being done to halt massive overpayments by the DSS Benefits Agency.

The National Audit Office, the public finance watchdog, estimates around £540m a year is paid in error by the Agency to

receivers of income support alone. The documents supplied to the *Independent* reveal the pilot exercise is to cover income support, contributory benefits and social fund payments.

So bad has the problem of overpayments by the Benefits Agency become that for the last five years the NAO has refused to give the DSS's accounts a clean bill of health. At present overpayments made through official error are written off while the Agency tries to pursue cases where claimants' finances have changed.

On 12 September John Coyle, the head of the Benefits Agency's debts recovery section,

Leading article, page 18

wrote to senior colleagues to say ministers were thinking about market testing their work. However, "ministers have expressed concerns about some of the sensitivities of debt recovery work and have asked for them to be evaluated via a pilot before they decide whether debt recovery is suitable for market testing," wrote Mr Coyle.

In an accompanying management note he wrote: "Ministers have asked for a pilot exercise to assess private sector performance on sensitive issues such as confidentiality, collection methods, standards of conduct and public acceptability." And they will be expected to adopt the same tough methods as if they were working for a private client. The idea, wrote Mr Coyle, is "to test the full range of recovery activities, in particular litigation and door-to-door collection."

Part of the exercise, to begin in March, will entail ministers studying possible abuses of confidentiality by the private bailiffs. For the pilot to be successful, said the note, it must address "ministerial concerns". In particular Mr Coyle explained the market test must cover the following areas: "Confidentiality - identify instances of misuse, abuse of data; political sensitivity - gauge public perception of private sector involvement; collection methods - assess acceptability to public and Benefits Agency; standards of conduct - assess acceptability and stringency of standards."

Each firm will receive 3,750 cases. They will have from March until November next year to retrieve the cash or else the case must be handed back to Benefits Agency officials. The whole exercise, including the hiring of management consultants to monitor the results according to Mr Coyle's paper is budgeted to cost £548,000.

A spokesman for the CPSA, the civil service union, said this was "the most sensitive so far of the market testing exercises at the Benefits Agency". His union, he said, was deeply opposed to the study and the fact that the Government was preparing to first "test the waters" with a pilot was proof of ministers' own misgivings.

Chris Smith, Labour's social security spokesman, said he was horrified by the plan to use private bailiffs. "It is obviously necessary for the Benefits Agency to recoup money owing to it. But this is certainly not the way to go about it. There is a serious danger that private debt collecting sharks could be let loose with official authority. Ministers should think again."

Castro spoils party as UN squabbles



Dressed to vilify: Fidel Castro discarded his familiar army fatigues yesterday to address the UN's 50th anniversary bash, but abandoned none of his fiery invective. Right: Castro in 1960 at the height of the Cold War when he spoke for an agonising four hours

DAVID USBORNE
NEW YORK

Fidel Castro came to the United Nations yesterday dressed like a banker but still roaring like a revolutionary lion. While he did not quite bang the podium with his shoe like Nikita Khrushchev did 35 years ago, he flailed his enemies with his rhetoric, accusing the UN itself of "exalting a new colonialism".

With no fewer than 140 world leaders in New York for the 50th anniversary bash of the UN - the largest such congregation in the history of mankind - the Cuban President shone more brightly and more angrily than any of his peers. But he had one friend among the crush: President Boris Yeltsin, who collided with him at lunch with an extravagant display of comradely greetings.

Not that Mr Castro was the only leader to introduce shards of disharmony to proceedings that had been envisaged as a non-controversial celebration of post-Cold War peace. Mr Yeltsin threw rocks in Nato's direction while almost everyone pointed an accusatory finger at the United States for its part in tipping the UN into near-bankruptcy by failing to pay its dues.

His beard still unkempt and greying, Mr Castro had none of the less discarded army fatigues for a double-breasted suit. He also almost honoured the five-minute limit imposed on each leader at the podium, winding up after just seven. (In 1960, he rambled for an agonising four hours.)

The first among the leaders to speak, Mr Clinton did not miss the chance to include a dig at Mr Castro, noting that "throughout this hemisphere, every nation except one has chosen democracy". But Mr Castro dealt a harsh return shot against continuing American sanctions against his country. "We lay claim to a world without ruthless blockades that cause the death of men, women and children, youths and elders, like noiseless atomic bombs."

And in words that will have found sympathy in many small states, Mr Castro made a searing attack on the five permanent members of the Security Council. "The obsolete veto privilege and the ill-use of the Security Council by the powerful are exalting a new colonialism within the UN itself," he said.

In ominous tones, Mr Yeltsin warned of a "new confrontation tomorrow" if Nato was allowed to expand eastwards to include the old European satellites of the former Soviet Union. "This is not the way to build a just world order," he said.

Clinton's warning, page 10



Drug manufacturers might sue over Pill scare

JOJO MOYES

The manufacturers of the seven brands of contraceptive Pill at the centre of the Government's health scare are considering taking legal action over the handling of last week's warning.

Organon, manufacturer of Marvelon and Mercilon, two of the world's best-selling brands of the Pill, said it was concerned that the decision of the Committee on

Safety of Medicines (CSM) to warn women about alleged increased health risks appeared to have been made "with undue haste" and without adequate analysis of the data in question.

The Government's warning that taking the seven types of Pill could double the risk of a blood clot was based on three unpublished studies, the principal one being led by Professor Walter Spitzer of McGill University,

Montreal. Organon said in a statement: "Professor Spitzer's comments that the [Medicines Control Agency's] interpretation of his data was incorrect confirms our belief that the CSM has acted prematurely. Organon Laboratories has taken legal advice and in the light of Professor Spitzer's comments is currently reviewing its legal position."

A spokesman for Wyeth, the United States-based manufacturer of Minulet and Tri-Minulet, said that legal action "was certainly a matter for consideration when we receive the information requested from the Secretary of State".

This was reiterated by Schering HC, the manufacturers of Femodene, Femodene ED and Bifadene. A spokesman said yesterday that the company was examining the impact of the Government's warning and "assessing its position". All three companies say they have not yet received copies of the research data upon which the Government's warning was based, in spite of requests.

According to some experts the pharmaceutical companies may be anticipating potential legal action against themselves on the basis of their knowledge of possible side-effects and the warnings they gave. Another motive for them to take legal action could be the effect the warning has on share prices.

Karen Woolfson, of the credit rating agency Standard and Poor's *MarketScope* magazine, said City analysts were shocked by the scare and "confused" by the handling of the situation. She said they would need to assess its impact on the United Kingdom market and elsewhere. Kenneth Calman, page 18



Amis: 'One of the masters'

Kingsley Amis, the Old Devil, dies at 73

MARY BRAID

Sir Kingsley Amis, 73, one of the finest English writers of the 20th century, died in hospital yesterday morning. Last night tributes poured in for Sir Kingsley, who burst on to the literary scene in 1954 with his celebrated first novel, *Lucky Jim*, and whose consistent and prolific output was still being recognised

in 1986 when *The Old Devil* won the Booker Prize. He was knighted in 1990.

Melvin Bragg, controller of arts at London Weekend Television, said Sir Kingsley, whose son Martin has also won literary acclaim, had dominated literature for half a century.

Sir Kingsley was perhaps as famous for his outspokenness, ferocious drinking, extreme

right-wing views and misogyny as for 20 novels and six volumes of verse.

Malcolm Bradbury, academic and writer, who knew him for 30 years, said last night that his hard-drinking image was often an act designed to preserve his privacy. Prof Bradbury added that he was one of four great fiction writers in Britain in the late 20th century, alongside William

Golding, Anthony Burgess, and Doris Lessing.

Auberon Waugh, novelist and journalist, said: "In *Lucky Jim* he absolutely captured the tone of the times in the way that Martin Amis has done for this generation." The journalist and playwright Keith Waterhouse said Sir Kingsley would be "badly missed" at London's Garrick Club. "He was a cur-

mudgeon but we all knew it was an act."

Born into a lower middle class South London family, Sir Kingsley served in the Royal Signals during the war and after Oxford became a junior lecturer at Swansea, where his experiences formed the basis for *Lucky Jim*, published in 1954. Fun-loving man, page 3

Obituary, page 16

IN BRIEF		COMMENT	
Schumacher crowned Another post-race clash between Michael Schumacher and Damon Hill lent an edge to the Pacific Grand Prix, which the German won in his Benetton to clinch his second consecutive World Championship. Britain's David Coulthard was second in the race, Hill third. Page 28	Walters vs Clarke Bizarre new Tory divisions on Europe emerged after Sir Alan Walters, former economic adviser to Margaret Thatcher, said he would fight Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, for his Ruscliffe seat as a candidate for Sir James Goldsmith's Referendum Party. Page 5	Forest plan takes root The winning bids in Britain's first tree-planting auction will be announced today, signalling the creation of a county-sized National Forest in the scarred, unleafy landscapes of the north Midlands. The aim is to plant 66 square miles of woodland by 2010. Page 4	Essay: Town vs Country is an ancient war. Will we ever make peace? Page 17
Death row crisis The fate of eight men on death row in Belize, whose executions have been halted by a British court, is threatening a constitutional crisis in the Commonwealth. Page 22	Laker flies back Sir Freddie Laker, now 73, blames a "great conspiracy" for the collapse of Laker Airways 13 years ago, but is plotting reincarnation on a Europe-Florida run. Page 21	David Marsh: Why France is in a mess. Page 19	Another View: The Chief Medical Officer defends his actions in the Pill row. Page 18
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news

Prison governors predict 'months of disarray'

STEPHEN WARD
Legal Affairs Correspondent

Prison governors warned yesterday that management of the service is likely to be in disarray for months following the sacking of Derek Lewis.

Brendan O'Friel, chairman of the Prison Governors' Association, said that as Director General of the Prison Service agency, Mr Lewis had developed a centralised power structure which could not work with

anyone else at the helm. The Prison Service would have to be reorganised before it would work effectively, he said.

Mr O'Friel told the *Independent*: "Derek Lewis was working immensely long hours, and he had this immensely retentive memory for detail, and if you remove Derek at one fell swoop, all that goes. They are going to have to reorganise things. Nobody can do what Derek was doing."

Mr O'Friel said that in the

week since Mr Lewis was sacked, his contacts with prisoners, prison staff, governors and Prison Service headquarters, which had shown the episode had "traumatised the service". He said: "At the very least, people are very confused about where we are going."

A letter from the Prison Governors' Association will arrive on Michael Howard's desk this morning calling on him to stop interfering in Prison Service operations. It warns Mr

Howard that intervention in "even minor operational matters" is causing both bad management and lapses in security.

Mr Howard resisted calls to resign last week in the wake of the Learmont prison escape at Parkhurst prison, saying that operational responsibility was not his, but solely Mr Lewis's.

Mr O'Friel's letter argues that Learmont itself actually blames ministerial involvement for the lapses of management

which led to the Parkhurst debacle. His letter tells Mr Howard: "Page 93 of the Learmont report itemises the extent to which those at the top of the service were spending their time on ministerial papers and briefings."

"This reduced the time they could give to managing and leading the service. There is substantial scope for immediately reducing ministerial oversight of minor operational matters."

A confidential Home Office

document leaked to the *Independent* yesterday casts doubt on Mr Howard's claim that he left day-to-day running of the prison service to Mr Lewis.

The document shows that a group of civil servants set up by Mr Howard nine months ago to "monitor" Mr Lewis's agency had as one of its aims "to work with the Prison Service so that working methods, priorities and objectives for the service reflect Ministers' priorities".

Mr Howard faced criticism

from another source yesterday. Judge Stephen Timmins, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, who has been forced by Mr Howard to retire on 1 November, said Mr Howard seemed no longer to want any independent advice.

His views were corroborated by Home Office sources, who said Mr Howard had rebuked the Prison Ombudsman, Sir Peter Woodhead, after the publication of his critical first half-yearly report last month.

IN BRIEF

Paras return to Northern Ireland

The Parachute Regiment is earmarked to return to Northern Ireland next year. The news comes two months after the regiment's 2nd Battalion left Belfast following a two-year tour of the Province.

There had been suggestions that the regiment would be withdrawn following the IRA ceasefire. However, senior Army sources denied the speculation and 2 Para is scheduled back there for a six-month tour in the latter part of 1996.

Sinn Féin attacked the decision as "provocative and insensitive" and a backward step in the search for peace.

Tower death plunge

Adrian Gannaway, 33, from Swindon, Wiltshire, plunged 300 feet to his death from Blackpool Tower. He was in a group visiting the highest viewing area of the tower on Saturday afternoon. As the party prepared to take the lift down Mr Gannaway said he had lost his wallet. He was last seen climbing on to safety netting on the edge of the tower from where he plunged to his death.

Drug abuse register

A national register of parents whose children have been involved in drug abuse has been launched. The register, which will form the basis of a network of support for parents, was set up during the first convention of parents' pressure groups against drugs, which was hosted by the Merseyside-based Parents Against Drug Abuse.

Castle sale's £55m

Sotheby's 15-day auction at a castle in Baden-Baden, southern Germany, netted £55m. It set a new world record for a house sale and was the longest in living memory. A total of 25,000 objects - belonging to the Margrave of Baden, whose late mother was the Duke of Edinburgh's sister - went under the hammer in 29 sessions.

Divorce protest

More than 50 Jewish women gathered outside the office of the Chief Rabbi in central London to demand a change in "discriminatory" religious laws on divorce which enable a wife to divorce her husband in a civil court but still remain "chained" to her husband if he refuses to grant a religious divorce, or *Get*.

Soldier charged

Lance Corporal David Anthony Doody, 26, of the Prince of Wales Royal Regiment based in Canterbury, Kent, is due to appear before magistrates in Basingstoke, Hampshire, today on charges of attempted murder and armed robbery.

Body found in wood

A murder inquiry was launched after a man was found tied up and strangled in woods. The body of John Dawson, 56, from Carlton, Nottingham, was discovered in John's Lee Wood, Markfield, Leicestershire.

Three share jackpot

Three ticketholders shared this week's £8.9m National Lottery jackpot. The winning numbers were 2, 6, 17, 19, 21, 47 and the bonus number was 5.

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Fertility drug 'steps up risk of ovarian cancer'

ANNABEL FERRIMAN

Women who take Britain's most popular fertility drug for more than a year are at increased risk of ovarian cancer and should be regularly screened for the disease, according to a leading gynaecologist.

More than 1,000 women could be affected, according to Professor Stuart Campbell, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at King's College School of Medicine.

The drug, clomiphene citrate, which stimulates the ovaries to produce eggs, is taken by 16,000 women a month to help them conceive. Over a million women may have taken it since it first came on to the market under the brand name Clomid in 1966. Since then a second version has been launched.

Although the vast majority of users only take it for four to six months, some women are left on it for considerably longer.

Professor Campbell warns that such prescribing is dangerous. "A recent paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed that women who had been on it for more than a year had a considerably increased risk of cancer. We do not know whether they are at increased risk because the drug causes super-ovulation (the production of many eggs) or because it is an oncogenic [cancer

causing] drug, in its own right. But women who have been on it for over a year should be regularly screened by ultra-sound."

The Committee on the Safety of Medicines is also concerned about its long-term effects. In its "Current Problems" bulletin, it says: "Recently it has been suggested that clomiphene increases the risk of ovarian cancer. Use of clomiphene may be associated with a small increase in absolute risk when treatment is given for more than 12 cycles. We recommend that it should not normally be used for more than six cycles."

The report in the *New England Journal* last year which sparked off the worries suggested that taking the drug for more than a year increased the risk of ovarian cancer 11-fold. At present, no screening programme exists for the disease, which kills 4,000 women a year. Although it is less common than breast cancer (5,000 cases a year, compared to 28,000), the cure rate is worse because it is usually detected very late. The five-year survival rate is 28 per cent, compared to 62 per cent for breast cancer.

Peter Brannock, medical director of the Midland Fertility Services Clinic, said: "Women who have been on clomiphene for a long time may be at increased risk. But it must be remembered that ovarian cancer

is much less common than breast cancer, so even if the risk is increased, it is still small. Clomiphene is a damn good drug if it is used sensibly."

Mrs Susan Rice, chief executive officer of Issue, the national fertility association, said: "It worries us that some women are taking it for too long. We do not think anyone should be on it for more than a few months. If it is going to work, it is going to work within that time anyway. We would advise anyone who has been on it for more than a year to see their doctors and consider asking for screening."

Howard Jacobs, professor of reproductive endocrinology at University College London and chairman of the British Fertility Society, said: "The paper in the *New England Journal* is flawed. The women who develop cancer in the study had several different kinds and it is unlikely that there is one cause ... But it reminded doctors that no drug is without side-effects. I see women who have been on clomiphene for years. That is irresponsible prescribing."

Dr Mercia Page, of Serono UK, makers of Serophene (a trade name for clomiphene), said: "The data sheet recommends no more than six cycles. If a patient has had several cycles and not conceived, the doctor should be thinking of moving her on to a different drug."



Innocent victim: Horses were Jessie Hurlstone's 'main interest'

Photograph: Apex

'Stalker' may have murdered stable girl

PETER VICTOR

Police investigating the murder of a stable girl found battered to death in her caravan home are looking into claims that she had been living in fear of an obsessive stalker. Friends of Jessie Hurlstone, 27, say she had been plagued by a man for three weeks at the National Hunt stables where she worked near Buckfastleigh, Devon.

Hawson Stables, where Ms Hurlstone worked, have been run by Richard Frost and his wife Glyne for more than 30 years. Yesterday Mrs Frost recalled how Ms Hurlstone was worried about being stalked by a man on Friday night, but turned down an offer to sleep in the main building. Instead, Mr Frost escorted her to the caravan to make sure she got there safely.

Mrs Frost said yesterday that horses had been Ms Hurlstone's main interest. She had no boyfriend and lived in the caravan near the stable block with her four cats and a dog. "She certainly did not deserve this," Mrs Frost added. "It was a jealous thing, by someone who had an obsession over her. I think the stalking had been going on seriously for about two or three weeks."

Yesterday police were investigating the claims. They continued to question a 38-year-old man who, they said, had been arrested at Dartbridge, near Buckfastleigh, but was not employed at the stables. Police said that he and the victim knew one another.

Ministers wary of Heseltine's electronic eye

NIC CICUTTI

Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, is setting up a new electronic diary, controlled from his office, aimed at centralising information and announcements from all Government departments.

However, some of his ministerial colleagues are believed to be ready to hinder the move, due to start today, because they think it will simply lead to Mr Heseltine "cherry-picking" all favourable publicity for himself.

One instance where this is already believed to have happened was in August, when a favourable report on the state of the British economy was



Heseltine: 'Cherry-picking'

issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a club of rich nations.

The Government's reaction to the OECD report was front-

ed by Mr Heseltine, although the Treasury had already lined up its own ministers to discuss the contents with the media.

Treasury ministers were later said to have been "surprised" at Mr Heseltine's intervention. Other departments are said to have been similarly affected.

One Whitehall source said: "Heseltine has taken over as the person in charge of the Government's presentation of news. But he does not want to be known as the Minister for Banana Skins. Everything must go through him. [There is] a danger that he will cherry-pick."

On his appointment as right-hand man to the Prime Minister, Mr Heseltine made it clear

that he was there to manage the Government's day-to-day affairs.

Since July, has required every minister to inform him in advance of speeches, policy initiatives and other media-related events they are organising. Because it was simply done on paper and by phone, compiling the diary has tended to be haphazard, with some events being missed off the list.

The new computer system, installed at a cost of £80,000, links up every government department with Mr Heseltine's office. Each will be required to have one member of staff to input their department's activities. A final meeting of all those

involved, aimed at briefing them about their new responsibilities, took place earlier this week.

However, one official said: "If it looks like Michael Heseltine is taking over the presentation functions of their departments and leaving them with the bad news or things of no consequence, some people will be upset. It will then be easy for people to simply 'forget' to put things on the diary."

A Cabinet Office spokeswoman yesterday confirmed that a new computer diary would be on-line as from Monday: "It is a computerisation of procedures that already exist between different departments."

Clarke upbeat on economy

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Political Correspondent

Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, yesterday left the door open for tax cuts in next month's Budget with an upbeat appraisal of the economy in which low inflation had trimmed the costs of delivering public services.

In a determined bid to dampen down speculation that he might cut taxes by the equivalent of 2p off basic rate income tax, the Chancellor repeated that there would be no tax cuts if the country could not afford it. "If it is not in the public interest," he said, "I am not doing it."

He was admitted on BBC1's *Breakfast with Frost* that borrowing had been higher than he would have liked, while VAT revenues had fallen through low inflation. But he said that compared with his first two Budgets, "the third one ... I'm looking forward to, because we are on our way to being a very successful enterprise economy."

Mr Clarke will want to deliver something on Budget day. A National Opinion Poll survey for the *Sunday Times* showed Labour with a 30-point lead and

Tony Blair capturing the centre ground. Warning of tighter controls on public spending, Mr Clarke stressed that successful economies were low-spending, low-tax ones. "You have to control public spending without doing actual damage to key public services ... without damaging the welfare state in its essentials."

Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, meanwhile played down the prospect of his department picking up a larger share of the costs of caring for elderly people. "I think that individuals ... should accept responsibility for caring for themselves at the end of their lives. I also think the state should support those who are unable to pay that bill for themselves. There should be proper arrangements to encourage individuals to plan to meet that cost."

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, said any tax cuts would be a political sweetener. "For the first time Ken Clarke has been forced to admit that borrowing will be higher than predicted and tax revenues have dropped because of a faltering economy," he said.

Charities set to share in £40m lottery jackpot

More than 600 charities will hear today that they are to receive around £40m of lottery money, but the Government has found itself embroiled in fresh controversy after revelations that organisations representing asylum seekers in Britain will be beneficiaries in the first round of awards, writes Rhys Williams.

Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, also fended off criticism from Richard Branson that the National Lottery was being "driven not by fun but by greed" and had fallen into "the same disrepute as the 'fat cat' bosses of the privatised utilities". She accused Mr Branson, who bid unsuccessfully against

Camelot to organise the lottery, of sounding like a "disappointed loser".

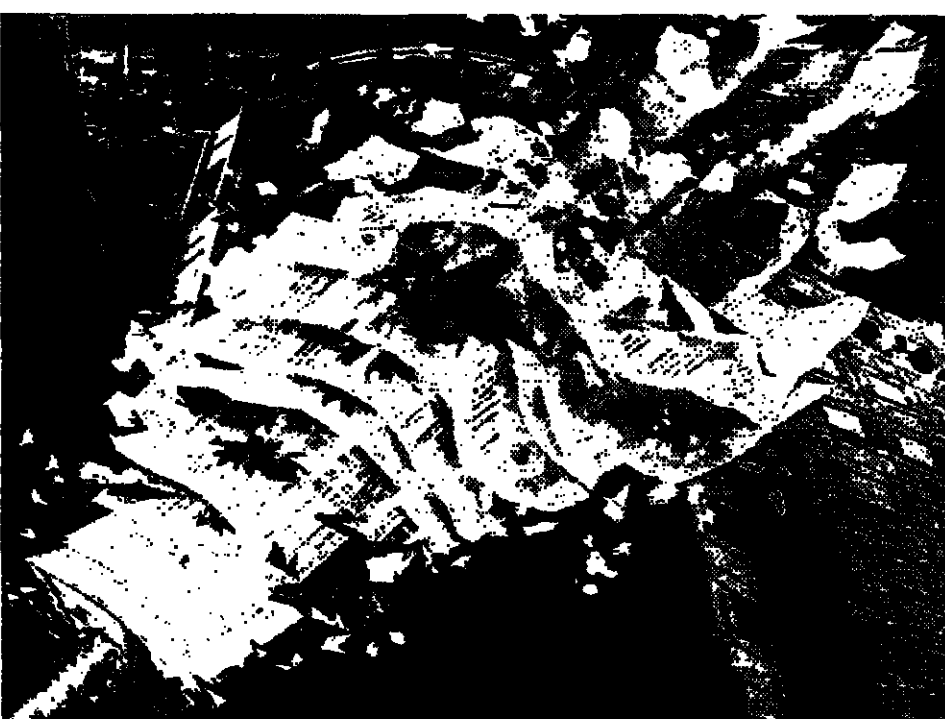
The National Lottery Charities Board will this morning announce the first round of lottery handouts designed to tackle poverty. Among those expected to receive money will be a London-based group which advises Eritrean refugees and

immigrants on benefits, medical treatment and legal services. It will receive £91,000.

A spokesman for the board said yesterday that a total of 627 charities tackling poverty in Britain will be awarded £40m today. A further £120m of awards would be announced in December. "A much greater range of small and larger or-

ganisations throughout the UK working to alleviate poverty will benefit. The types of groups include those working with children, young people, the disabled, elderly ... and many others," the spokesman said.

Mrs Bottomley said the lottery had raised millions of pounds for worthy causes around the country.



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صلى الله عليه وسلم

Sir Kingsley Amis: This 'Angry Young Man' of the Sixties retained his passion for literature up until his death yesterday

Fun-loving man who was 'driven to write'

MARY BRAID

His critics labelled him an irascible hard-drinking misogynist whose politics were somewhere right of Atila the Hun. But last night, those who loved and admired Sir Kingsley Amis concentrated on his literary achievement, his honesty, unpretentiousness, his "tremendous sense of fun".

"Kingsley loved to provoke people with his opinions," said Eric Jacobs, his biographer and friend, who insisted people misunderstood the trait. "He thought that if you were going to be right wing, there was no point in being half-hearted about it. People were always laughing when he was about. That was a lifelong thing."

Kingsley Amis, in fact, started out on the political left. That was unsurprising considering his background. He was born in 1922 and raised in Northbury, an undistinguished suburb of south London, in a lower middle class home.

His father was an office clerk. After a grammar school scholarship, the clever young Kingsley won another scholarship to Oxford, where he read English at St John's College.

He was always proud of his roots and, as an outsider, developed fiercely independent views on literature and society. He became labelled one of the "Angry Young Men" in the 1950s after his novel *Lucky Jim* satirised the manners and bourgeois values of the day.

He believed the social elite excluded the masses from culture, and confessed he always felt awkward with the highbrow upper class dons he mixed with for the two years he taught at Cambridge before leaving to become a full time writer.

But by the late 1960s Amis was already moving right. He ended up one of the right's strongest defenders.

Some critics regard the 1950s as his heyday but Amis continued to write and impress until the end. In 1986, he was awarded the Booker Prize for *The Old Devils*.

This year alone, he published two novels and finished a book on English language usage and was working on another novel when he died. Mr Jacobs said he managed all that without giving up his daily sessions in London's Garrick Club. He was, said Mr Jacobs, "driven" to write.

Some suggested Amis was jealous of his son Martin's literary success and that he had not read any of his novels. Martin, on the other hand, greatly admired his father and had read all his books.

Mr Jacobs said yesterday that there probably had been a bit of jealousy but that Amis had also been proud of his son, with whom he formed a unique literary dynasty.

What may have been at the root of any resentment was a fear that his son's distinctive style might affect his own.

He thought if you were going to be right wing there was no point being half-hearted about it

"He used to get rather irritated because he thought Martin was having an adverse effect on him," said Mr Jacobs. "He said he wished Martin would just write something simple like 'He finished his drink and left the bar'."

"He thought Martin always had to make his sentences work harder, and that reading Martin would encourage him to make his sentences work harder. But he also said to me that if people were still reading books in 50 years time they would probably see him and Martin as twigs on the same branch."

But if Amis really did not read Martin, neither did he favour any of his contemporaries. In fact, he found little to recommend modern literature, which he dismissed as pretentious or snobbish, and most evenings preferred to reread old favourites, such as Christopher Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell and George MacDonald Fraser.

Reading usually followed his favourite programmes, *The*

Bill and Coronation Street. He always believed that books had to be engrossing enough to compete with the lure of popular culture.

Amis was a man of tremendous habit who travelled little overseas and did not believe that foreign countries broadened the mind. Every week day he could be found "hunching" at the Garrick Club, in central London.

Every Saturday lunchtime he was in the same local pub and every Sunday in Odette's, a restaurant in Primrose Hill, north London.

The living arrangements in the last 15 years of the life of this man of habit surprised many. After he split up with his second wife, novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard, with whom he eloped in 1964 and lived with for 16 years, he moved back in with his first wife Hillary Bradwell and her husband Lord Kilmarock in Primrose Hill.

The arrangement was unusual - Hilly acted as housekeeper to Amis - but it seemed to suit all concerned. It was said that Amis had been lonely on his own in his large home in nearby Hampstead.

Among the many phobias he confessed to in his 1991 memoirs were fear of the dark and of being alone. Ferocious drinking and womanising were said to have blighted his marriages.

Amis's reputation for misogyny grew out of his books and his public utterances. Jacobs thinks it is exaggerated but admits: "He did have a view over a considerable period of time that women talked a lot to cover up the fact they had nothing to say."

But bores of any sex seemed to annoy him most and the Garrick is littered with people who know he did not suffer fools gladly. Asked if Amis died a happy and fulfilled man, Jacobs answers: "No, but don't ask me why. Part of the reason was the loneliness of the profession he chose. He used to say he would quite like to have been a journalist."

"He preferred journalists, writers and publishers to the academics he met in the early part of his life. He loved company."

Obituary, page 16



Unfulfilled: Amis was not a happy man, partly because of the loneliness of his profession Photograph: Rex Features

Literary genius whose wit was wicked

Jim Dixon, the accident-prone provincial university lecturer in *Lucky Jim*, may have been Kingsley Amis's funniest creation. The novel, which was published in 1954, helped create the genre of the campus novel later taken up by David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury

In this extract, Dixon wakes up with a hangover:

"Dixon was alive again. Consciousness was upon him before he could get out of the way; not for him the slow, gracious wandering from the halls of sleep, but a summary forcible ejection. He lay sprawled, too wicked to move, spewed up like a broken spider-crab on the tarry shingle of the morning. The light did him harm, but not as much as looking at things did; he resolved, having done it once, never to move his eyeballs again. A dusty thudding in his head made the scene before him beat like a pulse. His mouth had been used as a latrine by some small creature of the night, and then as its mausoleum. During the night, too, he'd somehow been on a cross-country run and then been expertly beaten up by secret police. He felt bad."

Dixon also enjoys elaborate gurning:

"He thought what a pity it was that all his faces were designed to express rage or loathing. Now that something had happened that really deserved a face, he'd none to celebrate it with. As a kind of token, he made his Sex Life in Ancient Rome face."

The pragmatic entertainer who said the unsayable



Literary dynasty: Kingsley Amis with his son Martin

Photograph: Nils Jorgensen / Rex Features

John Walsh, Literary Editor, charts the career of Amis, from poet to satirist

In the preface to his 1987 collection of stories *Ensign's Movers*, Martin Amis explains how he once tried to interest his celebrated father, Kingsley, in the plight of the whale. He explained how the giant mammals had become an endangered species, how they were hunted down for profit by Japanese and Scandinavian harpoon ships, and how, worst of all, their noble carcasses were flayed and used in the manufacture of rubber goods and cosmetics.

"I don't know," mused Kingsley. "It seems rather a good way of... using up whales."

The tone is unmistakable, its dry, unsentimental pragmatism wedded to a relish for saying the unsayable. In a writing career that spanned more than 40 years, Amis trained his pool-pooping scorn on targets of bewildering diversity: from pop music to the Reformation, from Swans to psychotherapy, from Yevushenko to the way people pronounce "corned beef".

If he was not actually a hater on a grand scale (he always seemed to me too sentimental to be a convincing hater) he was at least one of the century's greatest piss-takers. And if the pretensions for his educated bile sometimes seemed a little obscure, just watching (or reading) him in action was a terrific sideshow to the business of literature.

He started out as a poet, loosely connected to the writers of "the Movement" - Philip

Larkin, Donald Davis, DJ Enright - whose in-your-face, demotic and chortling bluntness suited his stumpy, south-London nose. But, as the publication of *Lucky Jim* revealed in 1954, his true métier lay in creating fictional characters upon whom the phoney modern world impinged a little too much.

His debut novel is full of scenes of cumulative hilarity: a madrigal concert at the ludicrous Professor Welch's home, Jim Dixon's awful discovery, on waking, that he has burnt a hole in his hostess's sheets, the drunken lecture that is interrupted by an accomplice throwing a fit. With its verbal tics and physical grotesqueries, this is heartless comedy that derives from Waugh and Furbank, but with a confiding, modern relish for abuse. It may be seen as morally inspired, or as driven by the exasperation a lower-middle-class hero feels for his alleged betters. The Fifties media preferred the latter explanation and so the "Angry Young Men" phenomenon was born.

Amis's subsequent books - *That Uncertain Feeling*, *Take a Girl Like You*, *I Want It Here*, *Girl, 20*, *One Fat Englishman* - pursued the same idiom of disgust (at provincial adultery, Sixties swingers, foreign parts, literary reputations, persons in authority, American

complacency) and were unfailingly entertaining, but more for their local effects, their tricks and digressions, than as coherent works of art. (All I can remember of *One Fat Englishman*, for instance, is the way the awful Roger Micheldene, in mid-screw, mentally declines his hoo-ho-ho to stop himself climaxing.)

After turning to genre fiction (the ghost story in *The Green Man*, alternative-world historical fiction in *The Alteration*, the whodunit in *The Riverside Villas Murder*), Amis was clearly getting stuck for subjects. From this dilemma he wrote (after *Martin*) a brilliant squib, *Advice to a Writer*: "That time you heard the archbishop say 'You did quite right to say that! And should the ploughboy turn gold? The news would make our day! But when the ploughboy farts henceforth/Forget about it, eh?'"

The solution was to turn his own fear of impotence and his increasing exasperation with feminism, into targets of parody, and *Jake's Thing*, in particular, offers a coldly passionate, long-stewed litany of misogynistic dislike in its penultimate paragraph. His next novel, *Stanley and the Women*, got him banned in America.

What had started out as the parodic voice of intolerant Englishness gradually hardened into

the persona of Amis's later years - the crusty curmudgeon, floor-scooting Scotchman after breakfast, setting the world to rights with syntagmatic chums in the Garrick Club, half in love with Baroness Thatcher, anti-women, anti-welfare, anti-Europe.

The image was hard to gain-say but it was not the whole truth. I met Sir Kingsley half-a-dozen times, and was struck by his keenness to engage with strangers. Rather than lay down the law, he would demand your opinion; if it differed from his own, he would seek to change your mind rather than bully. He was always friendly, slightly alarming, endlessly entertaining.

He was an odd mixture of the engaged and the dismissive, the strident and the vulnerable, a man who cared greatly for friends and books and loyalty but affected to be beyond such things. He was genuinely concerned in 1990 that readers of his wonderfully bitchy *Memoirs* were shocked by his scurrilous stories about his best friend, Philip Larkin.

He was a moralist in a minor key, more concerned that people should say "tinned peaches" and not "tin peaches", than that they should worry about nuclear disarmament. This may be why his novels will probably be best remembered as records of their time - the foolish and phoney behaviour patterns of 40 years, as seen by an imperipate, don't-give-me-that-spectator.

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NICHOLAS SCHOON
Environment Correspondent

He will create footpaths in

Forest planned for the outskirts of Birmingham



Photograph: Steve Hill/News Team

Both the Government and the public now want broad-leaved natives like the oak and ash to be planted on lowlands, near to towns and cities where people can walk among them. More than a dozen community forests are being grown. The

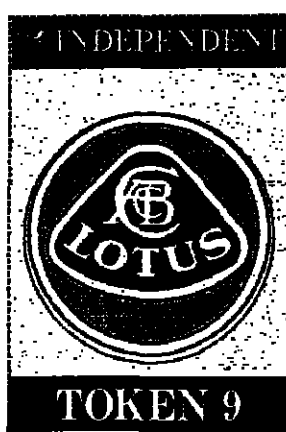
The road to a sylvan Britain may not be altogether smooth, however; the public will want to visit the new forests, but landowners seek limited access – and uses must be found for the new landscape. Many low-

the new hardwood. Many lowland woods are neglected because the industries they once supplied have largely vanished. Britain needs to rebuild these markets, or find alternatives, if its new woodlands are to provide more than scenery and wildlife habitats.



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Architectural mecca: The former Dunlop factory in Gwent, which has been compared to St Paul's and the Royal Festival Hall. Photograph: Gareth Everett

Demolition threat to industrial landmark

ROGER DOBSON

A factory described as one of Britain's most important post-war industrial buildings is threatened with demolition.

An application is being made this week to pull down the former Dunlop factory at Brynmawr, Gwent, a Grade II* listed building, which was not only built to a revolutionary design between 1946 and 1951, but was also conceived as a way of fundamentally improving work-place conditions for employees. The huge domed building, designed by an architect's co-operative, became a mecca for the world's leading architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright. The 207,000 sq ft factory, which has been empty since 1982, was built of reinforced concrete and the roof consists of nine huge domes with circular holes acting as skylights.

The application by the receivers controlling the factory site to demolish the building comes only days after Cadw, the

Welsh heritage agency, described it in a new guide to the best buildings in Wales as one of the top seven modern buildings of the principality.

The Twentieth Century Society, one of 50 objectors to demolition, says the building is unique. "The buildings are recognised as socially, technically and aesthetically innovative and built to a brief which required a new attitude to industrial management, and working conditions."

The architects were idealistic and aimed at a new standard for industrial building.

"It captivated a generation of architects and has been compared to St Paul's Cathedral and the Royal Festival Hall. It remains a beautiful and impressive space and its significance as an experiment in industrial democracy remains."

Architect Richard Parnaby said: "It was very innovative at a time when most factories were unheated sheds. It had only one entrance so that all

grades had to go in the same way. It also had only one restaurant for managers and workers. There were medical facilities, and the whole place was built for the people using it."

The building has been unused since 1982 and several proposals for an alternative use have failed.

The Save Britain's Heritage group also opposes demolition and points out that it was the first post-war building in Britain to be listed. The group describes its status as "of international repute" and suggests that an application could be made for lottery money to help revitalise the site.

The application to demolish and replace it with housing and shops, made by the receivers acting for two companies, goes before Blaenau Gwent Borough Council on Thursday. A report says "demolition should be recommended to the Secretary of State for approval together with outline planning application for redevelopment".

Goldsmith behind bid to unseat Chancellor

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Political Correspondent

Bizarre new Conservative divisions over Europe emerged yesterday after Sir Alan Walters, former economic adviser to Margaret Thatcher, announced his intention to fight Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, for his Rushcliffe seat as a candidate for the party set up by billionaire financier Sir James Goldsmith.

Mr Clarke, who holds the Nottinghamshire constituency with a 19,766 majority, declared that arch Euro-sceptic Sir Alan, who helped bring about Nigel Lawson's resignation as Chancellor in 1989, did not live in the real world, while other Tory MPs joined Mr Clarke in condemning the entire Referendum Party enterprise as one that could let in Labour or the Liberal Democrats in marginal seats by splitting the Conservative vote.

The immense wealth of Sir James, elected as an MEP last year for L'Ardre Europe, the political grouping he chairs, has enabled him to pour thousands of pounds into his new British party. At the next election it plans to fight in every mainland constituency where Tory and Labour candidates have not publicly supported calls for a referendum on Britain's links with Europe, and says that a fur-

ther crop of high-profile figures are among the 1,500 people who have put their names forward as candidates.

Sir James lives in France and Mexico, while Sir Alan spends most of his time in America. But among those likely to resent such foreign interference are those with equally Euro-sceptic views.

A warning was even sounded by Gerald Howarth, the Thatcherite former MP who is standing for ultra-safe Aldershot at the next election and whose PR firm, Taskforce Communications, is acting for Sir James through fellow director Patrick Robertson, former secretary of the anti-Brunel Bruges Group.

Mr Howarth declared that recent interference by the European Court of Justice, such as on prescription charges for men at 60, was unacceptable, adding: "People must understand that this is not some abstract issue. What the Conservative party must do ... is continue to demonstrate its commitment to opposing federalism. The next Conservative government should rule out a single currency." A move to oppose the Government could play into the very hands of those prepared to concede surrender of control of national affairs, he said.

Sir James' move has also provoked the anger of Alan Sked, the leader of the far less financially well-endowed UK Independence Party, which secured 157,000 votes in last year's European Parliament elections. Dr Sked, another founder-member of the Bruges Group has accused Sir James of wanting to remain within a EU protected by high tariff barriers and has dismissed as barmy his foray into British politics.

Sir Alan's choice of Kenneth Clarke's constituency - which he has a virtually nil chance of winning - appears little more than symbolic, but is calculated to cause maximum embarrassment to John Major, who is not firmly committed either way to a referendum, and Mr Clarke, who is opposed.



Sir Alan Walters: aims to embarrass Government

DAILY POEM

Two Views of the City

By Lawrence Sail

The first, optically false but true - the vertical, the image of the thematic mapper sensor - dear God, you think, and how could anyone live in such a vascular wilderness, when the river is already more black than blue, and seems to cringe away from the land? And then, the land itself, dyed into patterns of heat and bruised blue ...

The second, horizontal - you squint across the roofs to more walls and more roofs, and then more walls - but everywhere, the windows march along and up and down, sucking the poor day in. The sunlight that strikes the occasional blank surface is the last. If you wanted a proof of madness, you know it is here, in the angles which finally cannot hold.

Lawrence Sail was born in London in 1942 and brought up in the West Country. A freelance writer and broadcaster, he has published seven collections of poems, including *Out of Land: New and Selected Poems*, published in 1992 by Bloodaxe in 1992. He was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship in 1992, and an Arts Council Writer's Bursary in 1993. This poem appears in his latest collection, *Building Into Air*, published by Bloodaxe at £6.95.

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news

Death row appeals spark crisis for justice

HEATHER MILLS
Home Affairs Correspondent

The fate of eight men whose executions have been halted by a British Court is threatening a constitutional crisis in the Commonwealth.

The Privy Council – the final Court of Appeal for about 16 Commonwealth countries – has stayed the imminent executions of the eight on Belize's death row, pending appeal.

Last year it reprieved two more, whose murder convictions were reduced to manslaughter.

But in an extraordinary ruling last month, Belize's Chief Justice, Sir George Brown, maintained the Privy Council's intervention was unlawful, thus paving the way for the men's executions. What is worrying human rights lawyers is that preceding his 13-page judgement, he said he had received "divine inspiration".

Founded at the time of the Norman Conquest, the Privy Council became, at the height of the British Empire, the most powerful court in the world. But now the Law Lords who make up its judicial committee deal with only about 130 cases a year from both dependent and independent territories.

While many in the Commonwealth have come to view the Privy Council as a kind of human rights court, operating

in the same way that the European Court in Strasbourg sits in judgement on the UK, governments in such countries as Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are increasingly viewing it as an interfering relic of colonialism. They believe that the British judges are too far removed from the reality of life in the Caribbean.

The issue of capital punishment has brought matters to a head, as governments try to deal

with high crime levels and to please voters who support hanging.

Over the years, the Privy Council has saved hundreds of lives throughout the Commonwealth territories.

Belize is one of those independent countries which is currently seeking to amend its constitution and abolish appeals to London. But to do so, the ruling United Democratic Party needs to secure a three-

quarters majority in Parliament and with only a slim majority, it is unlikely to succeed. Until it does, the Privy Council maintains the rule of law.

In August, the Belize government tried unlawfully and in secret to execute two of the eight men, who had already given notice of their intention to appeal to the Privy Council. It was only after frantic transatlantic calls and the direct intervention of the British High

Commissioner that the executions were prevented.

But that intervention prompted the Chief Justice to act. Citing a pre-independence proclamation, he claimed the Law Lords in London were unlawfully and unconstitutionally accepting appeals out of time.

The Privy Council has been made aware of the situation and has been in touch with the Belizean authorities, indicating

that it will hear a challenge and that the stays on executions must remain. The Foreign Office said only that it was aware of the situation.

But the men's lawyers fear the authorities will proceed with the hangings, prompting others to follow suit.

Trinidad and Tobago attracted international condemnation for hanging a prisoner last year, in defiance of the Privy Council.

'Interfering anachronism' gives hope among squalor

Heather Mills
reports on Belize's challenge to the Privy Council

Outside Belize's death row, the stench from the open running sewer is overpowering. Inside, the 10 men sentenced to the gallows battle with flies and mosquitoes attracted by the stink.

For 23-and-a-half hours a day, they are confined to the cells, which open on to the sewer. Some who now share the cells – the top floor of a concrete block of the Hattville prison outside Belize City – are sleeping on the floor. They rely on family and visiting charities to supplement their basic bread and water prison diet.

That is how it was last 22 August, when the monotonous calm of the "row" was suddenly broken by the serving of execution warrants on two of the inmates. Pasquell Bull and Herman Mejia were about to hang at 8am on 25 August – the first to be executed in Belize for 10 years. Yet both had given notice of appeal to the Privy Council in London, and that should have meant an automatic stay on execution, pending their appeals.

The warrants sent panic throughout death row. No less than eight were intending to take their cases to London.

Bull and Mejia, both convicted of murder, were not allowed to alert their families or lawyers. They were taken out, weighed and measured for the "drop", and on the morning of the planned execution, they



were given the last rites at 7am. But Belize is a small place with about 190,000 people and, unknown to the men, word of their imminent death had got out. Mejia's family had heard the news from the local gravedigger the evening before the planned execution and lawyers were alerted.

It began a frantic night of telephone calls and faxes between the men's lawyers in Belize and London, the Privy Council and the territory's law officers.

The Privy Council issued a stay but throughout the night efforts to relay the news to the Attorney General were thwarted. He had not returned calls, and fax machines appeared to have been switched off. It was only when the British High Commissioner in Belize personally tracked him down, that the executions were called off. It was at 7.30am – 30 minutes before the first execution.

But the intervention raised the threat of a constitutional crisis, with the Belize government

regarding Privy Council interventions as "unlawful" and lawyers and opposition groups fearful for the consequences for human rights and lack of checks on any abuse of power in the independent territory.

Last month, Sir George Brown, the Chief Justice of Belize, said that the Privy Council had been acting outside its powers and the government need not abide by its rulings. That could have fatal consequences for the men on death row. Four currently have appeals pending before the Law Lords in London who make up the Privy Council, claiming they are the victims of a miscarriage of justice. Four others, including Bull and Mejia, are seeking leave to appeal.

Yesterday Saul Lehrfreund, a lawyer from Simons, Muirhead and Burton, which represents seven of the eight in London, said: "I am extremely concerned about the well-being of our clients, whose constitutional right to life and the protection of the law could be

seriously violated by the government, if it ignored the Privy Council."

The men include Alfred Coddington, 34, convicted in 1993 of shooting Winston Moguel dead in the street and served with a death warrant last December. Coddington was never called to give evidence and his defence of provocation and self defence – he claims Mr Moguel attacked him as he cycled by – were never put to the jury.

Another is Ellis Tabo, convicted in 1992 of killing Gill Oborn, a voluntary worker. He maintains he had an alibi for the night of the killing and the only evidence against him appears to be a description of someone wearing similar clothes.

Mejia and Bull have both been convicted of double murders.

The government's resentment of the Privy Council is not unique to Belize. Some of the 16 countries which still retain the Privy Council as the final court of appeal now view it as



Condemned: Alfred Coddington (above) awaits the outcome of his appeal in Belize's crowded Hattville jail (left)

an interfering anachronism, far removed in miles and culture from their experiences.

With an electorate favouring capital punishment to combat crime, the governments resent the Law Lords in the Privy Council, who have deprived many sentenced to death, including hundreds throughout the Commonwealth in one landmark ruling which banned the execution of anyone detained for more than five years.

Last year Trinidad and Tobago attracted international condemnation for executing Glen Ashby at the same time as a Privy Council order for stay

of execution was being faxed through from London. A recent commission of inquiry concluded he had been unlawfully hanged.

Like Belize, some countries are now seeking to amend their constitution and divorce themselves from the Council.

However, according to Godfrey Smith, Secretary of the Bar in Belize, there is a strong belief among lawyers, human rights workers and others that until another final check or balance is in place – such as a court of appeal for the Caribbean, for example – the Privy Council is an essential

safeguard. Many dependent and independent territories are so small that getting a fair trial is difficult. Publicly means juries often come to cases with a fixed opinion, there is a fear of executive influence and, with no legal aid, the best lawyers are unlikely to take on the life and death cases.

The Chief Justice's ruling is being challenged in both the Belize courts and in the Privy Council. But in a move which concerns lawyers for the men on death row, the government has

been refusing to amend its constitution to abolish appeals to the Council, its own conduct must be based on respect for the rule of law for all its citizens, and the Council is a vital part of the legal system.

Belize's death row hope that its jurisdiction continues to prevail. Mr Lehrfreund echoed the concerns of some lawyers in Belize, when he said: "I am extremely worried that the authorities in Belize will use the judgement of the Chief Justice as justification for the execution of those on death row – despite the lawful intervention of the Privy Council."

"Until Belize amends its constitution to abolish appeals to the Council, its own conduct must be based on respect for the rule of law for all its citizens, and the Council is a vital part of the legal system."

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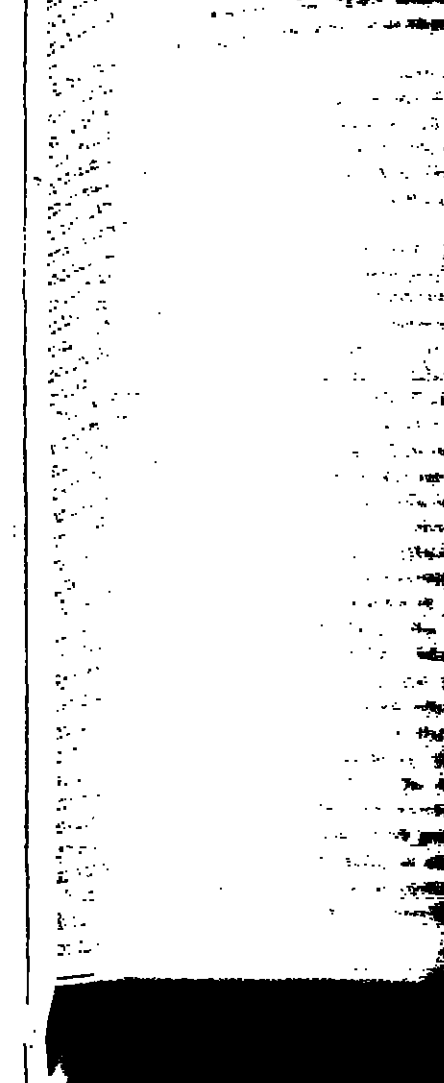
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DAVID USBORNE
New York

President Bill Clinton told world leaders yesterday that the perils of the Cold War had been buried only to be replaced by terrorism and drugs. He urged joint action to combat these "scourges".

The first amongst some 140 world leaders to address the 50th anniversary session of the United Nations in New York, Mr Clinton proposed the negotiation of an international declaration committing world governments to fighting global crime. The agreement would in-

clude a common pledge to deny sanctuary to such criminals so that they would have "nowhere to run, nowhere to hide".

Mr Clinton's remarks came amid a smorgasbord of proposals and exhortations for improved world peace, security and equality made during the first of three days of celebrations. The Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, also signalled the convention of a "Third Peace Conference" in Moscow in 1999 to tackle regional conflicts proliferating after the Cold War.

The subtlety running through all the speeches was the dire financial position of the UN, attributed in particular to \$1.3bn (£828m) of unpaid dues by the United States. The Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, called for an emergency session of the General Assembly early next year to work on solving the crisis.

"The financial crisis is a symptom of a deeper problem: member states simply do not regard the UN as a priority. This is sad news to report to this commemorative session," the Secretary-General said.

Unable simply to flourish a cheque for the missing funds because of deep antipathy to funding the UN in Congress, Mr Clinton vowed only to work with Capitol Hill on producing the money. He asked in return for proof of genuine progress on fundamental reform of the organisation.

"The UN must be able to show that the money it receives supports saving and enriching people's lives, not unneeded overheads." But pledging his own support for the UN and its goals, he concluded: "We still need the UN. And so, for another 50 years and beyond, you can count the United States in."

On global crime, Mr Clinton announced several unilateral initiatives, including steps to identify countries that tolerate money-laundering by drugs barons as well as action to tackle front companies for the cartels. The US, he said, had decided to freeze the assets of the Cali cartel. Of the money-launderers he said: "We cannot allow them to wash the blood of profits from the sale of drugs, from terror or organised crime."

Mr Yeltsin appealed for a new emphasis on using the Security Council as the principal forum for resolving conflicts. He made specific reference to Russian displeasure at the role that was given to NATO in forcing an end to the war in Bosnia.

"It is inadmissible for a regional organisation to make decisions as to the mass-use of force, bypassing the Security Council," he railed.

The Russian president also reiterated his opposition to the proposed eastward expansion of NATO, asking instead for the creation of a new all-European security organisation. "The question is an extremely acute one: either such a system should be established for all Europe, or, as in the past, for the selected few. The strengthening of one bloc today means a new confrontation tomorrow."

Algeria pulls out of Chirac meeting

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris
DAVID USBORNE
New York

A full-scale diplomatic row broke out last night between Algeria and France after Algerians abruptly announced the cancellation of President Jacques Chirac's planned meeting with President Zouari at the United Nations, accusing France of "attacking the dignity and sovereignty of the Algerian people".

No reason was given for the sudden cancellation of the meeting, scheduled to take place in New York on the fringes of the UN's 50th anniversary celebrations, which began today. However, it was reported to be President Zouari who requested that it be called off.

The meeting had been the subject of fierce political controversy in France, and outrage among Islamic militants in Algeria, since it was made public two weeks ago. It had also prompted a heavy reinforcement of security across France, with 2,500 extra troops being deployed on the streets following a threat from an Algerian Islamic terrorist group to continue its bomb attacks unless the meeting was halted.

It had been expected that the pair would meet discreetly at the New York hotel at which both are staying during the three-day celebration, but Mr Chirac said Mr Zouari had "decided to request a postponement" at the last moment "because of its modalities".

The Algerians wanted to publicise the event, said Mr Chirac, but "I did not believe I could agree to this demand, because I had conceived of the meeting as a working meeting with the current head of state". But in New York it was claimed that Mr Zouari pulled out after Mr Chirac refused to accede to an Algerian request that nothing be said about the meeting publicly.

Before leaving Paris, Mr Chirac had undertaken that

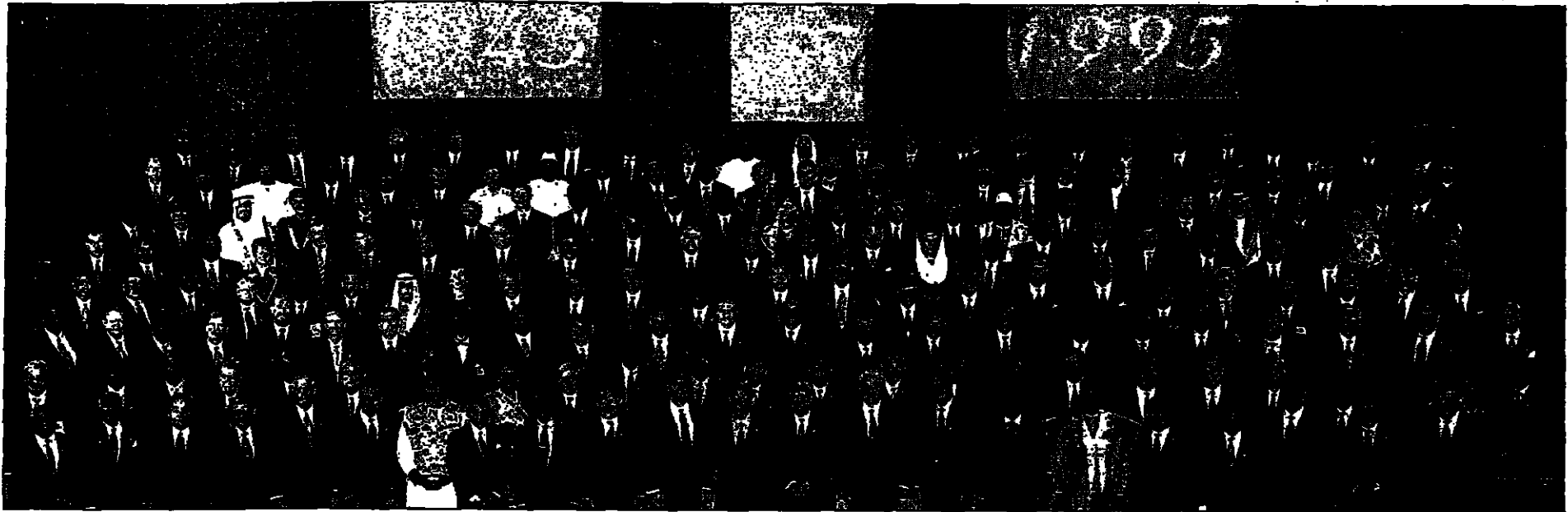
the meeting would be low-key, and without television cameras, in an attempt to counter criticism that it would imply French support for Mr Zouari in next month's Algerian presidential election.

The language from Algiers yesterday was virulent. A presidential spokesman was quoted as saying that the meeting "has lost its purpose". Alluding to France's colonial inheritance and history of interference in Algeria since the country's independence, the spokesman denounced "the persistence of unilateralist attitudes" and the "escalation of public remarks that can be seen as an attack on the dignity and sovereignty of the Algerian people".

In a detail that will be particularly uncomfortable to Mr Chirac, the Algerian spokesman said the meeting had actually been proposed by the French foreign minister, Hervé de Charette, who categorically denied this yesterday. French officials insisted that the meeting had been "requested" by Mr Zouari and that Mr Chirac had been left with little choice but to accept without precipitating a diplomatic incident.

The cancellation of the meeting by Algeria leaves Mr Chirac in the worst possible diplomatic position. He had weathered a storm of criticism at home and abroad which accused him variously of consorting with the leader of a repressive regime, favouring Mr Zouari's candidacy in the coming presidential election, behaving as a colonial power, and interfering in Algeria's internal affairs.

In recent days he mounted a concerted damage-limitation exercise, saying he would present the Algerian leader with the French point of view and would argue that the coming elections should be seen to be "fair and democratic". Mr de Charette's final efforts to this end were printed in yesterday's French press. Now, it appears, all that effort was for nothing. Mr Chirac has been made to look weak, and his diplomacy to appear disastrous.



School portrait: Men in suits dominate history's largest gathering of world leaders, posing with the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Photograph: John Isaac

Kodak captures 140 world leaders: the class of '95

New York — It was Kodak that brought meaning to the new world order. For a few brief minutes yesterday, the leaders of virtually every land on the planet succumbed to the collective discipline of posing for a giant school photograph to commemorate the 50th birthday of the United Nations, writes David Usborne.

In a cavernous conference room in the bowels of UN headquarters, presidents, potentates and princes were cajoled and bullied by a man from Kodak, to stand straight, stop chatting and to "smile as prettily" as the few women

leaders among them. "I thank you, Kodak thanks you and the whole world will thank you for coming along this morning," he said. Jiang Zemin of China seemed amused; Nelson Mandela of South Africa, looked as grim as his shirt was colourful.

In other regards, the three-day jamboree of 140 heads of state and government, the largest in the history of humankind, threatened to spin into glorious and untrammelled disorder. The five-minute rule that every leader is meant to respect at the podium to speak was violated by the first to get there: President Bill Clinton.

His speech lasted 15 minutes.

Nor was the chaos limited to the UN building. Ask any ordinary mortal who was trying to navigate the streets of Manhattan this weekend. As the myriad delegations sped about town in black-long motorcades, entire sections of the city were closed to traffic.

At 7am yesterday morning, when the leaders were already out of their beds and rolling towards the UN tower, the east side of midtown Manhattan was eerily empty. The normally jammed canyons of First and Second Avenues were deserted as far as the eye could see, except for galaxies of flashing police lights and the occasional black-limousined caravan of one leader or another.

Barely visible was the security blanket, surely one of the most intense ever deployed. Roof-tops revealed sharpshooters, just one element of an operation involving 3,000 US secret service agents and a large part of the New York police force. Among police concerns were various street protests orchestrated by opponents of leaders including Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Cuba's Fidel Castro, whose daughter, Alina Fernandez Revuelta, was leading the agitation against him.

First among the parties were dinners offered last night by President Clinton at the New York Library and by the New York Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, at the World Financial Center on Saturday. Pork, beef and shellfish were left off the menus to avoid giving offence to any of the guests. "Not all of our parties are capable of starting the Third World War, although with some of our weddings you might think so," remarked Liz Newman of the catering company for Mr Giuliani's bash.

President Castro was not invited to either occasion. He, however, was set to be feted by thousands of supporters at the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church at a special mass in his honour in Harlem last night.

There will be a few faces absent from the soon-to-be-historic Kodak moment. Saddam Hussein was not there, nor was Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Two faces that might have graced the front row, Helmut Kohl of Germany and John Major, were also missing. Mr Kohl, to general consternation, is not coming to New York, while Mr Major opted to pass on the first day of fun and was due to arrive in town late last night.

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Balkan conflict: Western alliance in a quandary over troop commitment □ Fears grow for missing Muslims around Banja Luka

Nato bogged down over peace force

UN begs Serbs to stop killings

SARAH HELM
Brussels

Anxiety is growing in European capitals and Washington that the US peace plan for former Yugoslavia may fall apart because NATO will be unable to deploy the 60,000-strong force needed to implement the deal.

The political, diplomatic and practical challenges presented by such an operation could well prove too tough for the alliance leaders to surmount, said senior US and European diplomats. "The chances of sending the peace-enforcement force are now only 50-50," one senior British source said.

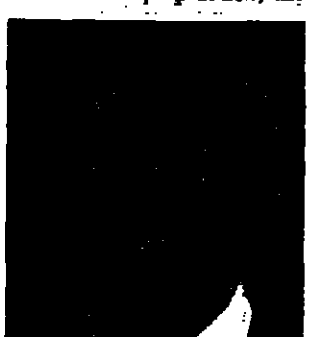
As world leaders meet at the United Nations this week, there is an acute awareness that if the NATO plan falls apart the consequences could be profound. "Without the peace enforcement force there would be no peace deal and no peace in the former Yugoslavia," a senior US diplomat said. The future of NATO would be called into question if it failed to seize this chance to build a Balkan peace. The West's relations with Russia would also be in danger of deteriorating. "This is a defining moment for NATO; for relations with Moscow and peace in the Balkans. It is going to be very difficult," said a defence planning source.

The most serious threat lies in the reluctance of the US Congress to give President Bill Clinton backing to send US troops with the NATO force. Republicans have always argued that the Balkans is a European, not an American, problem and are desperately afraid of US troops sinking into the quagmire of another foreign conflict. It is, however, inconceivable that the peace plan launched by the US should be implemented without the help of US forces.

Last week the Clinton administration, which clearly sees peace in Bosnia as providing a dream ticket for the 1996 presidential election, began an in-

tensive sales pitch to Congress, presenting the peace-enforcement operation as a chance for the US to show it is the only superpower. In a televised debate on CNN, Warren Christopher, the US Secretary of State, made clear to Americans that this was "no Vietnam" and warned that the stakes for world security were high. If the plan failed, "it will be very hard to predict NATO's future," he said.

"It would be a huge blow if after all this preparation, the



Warren Christopher: 'This will not be like Vietnam'

Americans found for domestic reasons they can't do it," said a senior European Union source.

The plan is also seriously threatened by the failure so far to agree how Russian forces will be deployed alongside NATO troops. President Boris Yeltsin told the UN yesterday that the Security Council must not be "relegated to the sidelines of events".

It was "inadmissible for a regional organisation [NATO] to make decisions on the mass use of force, bypassing the Security Council," he said. Mr Yeltsin

insists Russian forces should be included in the force, and NATO also supports the principle of a Russian contingent. However, the US insists that the force should come under sole NATO command, while Moscow is adamant that the command should be shared with Russia.

Any suggestion that the Russians should share command and control is dismissed by NATO and any Russian control would make it impossible for Mr Clinton to sell the plan to Congress. Mr Christopher admitted yesterday that it would "take some ingenuity" to find a way through the impasse.

Ideas have been canvassed for a special co-ordination committee to give the Russians some low-key say in the decision-making.

NATO says Russians could be given a non-combat role in the force, working with transport, mine-clearance or refugees. However, European intelligence experts put the chances of a deal with the Russians at less than 50 per cent. If the Russians were excluded, the force could still go ahead, but the diplomatic implications could be highly damaging.

Moscow might block votes in the UN security council, and European officials say Russia's exclusion might just "tip the balance" towards a more confrontational attitude from Moscow towards the West. Moscow's relations with NATO are already soured by NATO's plans to expand to the East.

Divisions are also opening up between the US military chiefs and the Europeans over the operational rules for the force.



Peace dividend: women in Sarajevo enjoying the autumn sunshine in the Bosnian capital yesterday

EMMA DAILY
Sarajevo

The trench warfare has stopped – at least for the time being – under the terms of the Bosnian ceasefire brokered by Washington, but there is concern that a campaign against civilians is continuing, particularly in Serb-held northern Bosnia. United Nations officials, who have been beset by the Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, to adhere to the part of the agreement which requires the humane treatment of civilians, fear for the safety of several thousand Muslims and Croats missing in the area.

Since mid-August more than 30,000 non-Serbs have been expelled from the northern Bosnia, but the expulsions stopped suddenly 10 days ago, when two big towns fell to government forces, leaving at least 2,000 more non-Serbs, mostly men of draft age, in Serb hands. "I would be happier if the expulsions began again," one UN official said. "At least we would know then that they are alive."

The numbers are sketchy, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but the agency believes that between 8,000 and 20,000 Muslims and Croats still remain in northern Bosnia of a pre-war population of more than half a million.

UNHCR officials based in Banja Luka have virtually no freedom to move around the

area, and have no idea how the last-ditch battles for Sanski Most and Mrkonjic Grad have affected the situation.

The fighting hindered the expulsions – UNHCR officials said the Serbs were too busy with the war effort – but the agency had expected the flow of refugees to resume last week. At least 1,000 people were due to cross the front line near Teslic, but never appeared.

"We know more people were rounded up than came away, especially men, who were separated," one UNHCR official said. "We're frightened some have been killed."

A Bosnian Serb dissident, Vladimir Strebrov, a writer and founder member of Mr Karadzic's SDS party, but who was seized by the Serbs in 1992 and sentenced to prison for treason, said yesterday that he had been jailed near Sarajevo with 136 people from Prijedor, in northern Bosnia. Mr Strebrov was released on Saturday as part of the ceasefire deal.

The UNHCR envoy, Anne-Willem Bijeveld, last week asked Mr Karadzic to stop the atrocities in northern Bosnia.

The appeal was repeated by the US human rights envoy, John Shattuck. "We make an urgent appeal to the Bosnian Serb leadership to stop these horrors," said Mr Shattuck, who has interviewed some of the Muslims and Croats expelled from the area.

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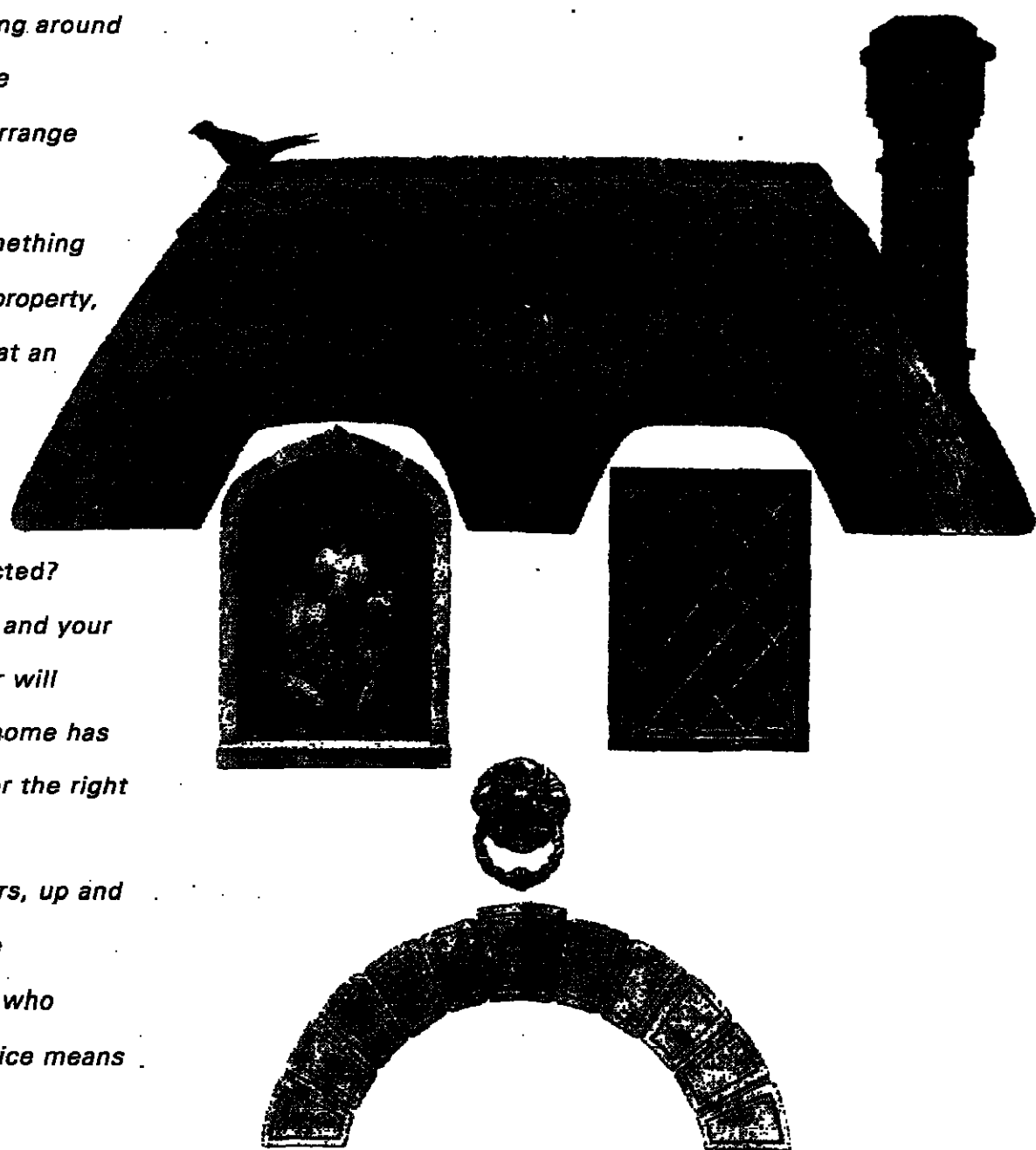
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international

Millionairess rescues Brazil's slum children

Phil Davison meets a woman saving youngsters from death or degradation

Rio de Janeiro — Joseph was not yet old. But he was certainly dead. The women in surrounding shanty huts, who smoked and clutched babies as they peered in at his body, had seen enough dead people to know the difference.

So had Yvonne Bezerra di Mello, a 48-year-old millionaire's wife, turned angel-of-mercy, who was making her daily visit to Rio's homeless street children. "There's one or two dead almost every day. Children, babies. Life and death means nothing here," she told me. The neighbours wanted her to get rid of the body. Rio's slum dwellers are not keen on going to the police and the sentiment is reciprocated.

Joseph was not a child. He appeared to be in his thirties and, by all accounts, was one of many Fagin-like males who dominate groups of orphaned street children. Neighbours said they had seen ragged boys as young as six living in his hut. They had disappeared earlier that morning, presumably after finding him dead.

No one knew his second name or whether he had a family. They knew only that he wore his frizzy hair in a bun, sold his body and probably those of his boy companions to men by day and snuffed glue or drank sugarcane alcohol in hut number SMH 120 by night. One of these vices seems to have killed him.

It was just another day at the "office" for Dr Bezerra, a philology graduate from the Sorbonne whose husband, Alvaro, is president of the Brazilian Hotel Association, a member of the family that owns the giant Othon hotel chain and one of Brazil's wealthiest men.

Two years ago, after police executed seven street children outside Rio's Candelaria church just to get them off the streets, she put away her jewels, gave up her coffee mornings and dedicated most of her days to helping street children survive.

Every weekday morning, around 8am, her chauffeur, nicknamed Ayrton because of the way he weaves through Rio

traffic, takes her from her luxury penthouse on Flamengo beach to a shanty settlement known as Coqueirinho (Little Palm) beneath concrete flyovers in the poor Sao Cristovao district. On the way, she stops to pick up coffee, cocoa, bread, butter, beans, cheese and rice.

At the shanty town she is rushed by children who clutch at her legs and climb to stroke and smell her clean, well-groomed hair.

On the day I accompanied her, the first order of the day was Joseph's body. She told his neighbours she would call the police on her way out. The neighbours replied that they would move out of the area until the police had gone. Nobody wanted to deal with the police, whom they blame for nightly killings in Rio's favelas (slums).

"He'll be buried in a communal grave without a name, almost as if he never existed," Dr Bezerra said. "In a way he didn't. These people barely exist. They have no hope. All we can do is help them survive another day."

Dr Bezerra and three friends set up the Centre for the Defence and Rights of Children and Teenagers with four main concerns in mind. First, the murder of street children, which they say continues almost nightly, one or two at a time, to avoid attracting the publicity of the 1993 Candelaria massacre, and often carried out by off-duty policemen hired by businessmen who see the children as social undesirables. Dr Bezerra estimates there are 4,000 street children in Rio de Janeiro and tens of thousands nationwide.

Their second concern is child prostitution, involving both girls and boys, sometimes no more than five years old.

The third is forced child labour, estimated to involve up to 7 million Brazilians between the ages of 10 and 17.

The fourth is the kidnapping of street children, usually carried out for prostitution or child labour. It's a kind of modern "white slave" trade, usually involving light-skinned girls



Angel of mercy: Yvonne Bezerra di Mello (seated) with the children who get food, schooling and a little love at her 'office'

Photograph: Phil

aged 11 or 12 who sometimes surface more than 1,000 miles from their homes.

Describing herself as an unarmed guerrilla — "the changes we need in Brazil require that kind of action, not words" — Dr Bezerra said no killers of street children had ever been convicted. "The three policemen detained for the 1993 Candelaria massacre have never been tried. Five others involved were never picked up. The killing has continued, with 1,500 street children aged between 11 and 17 murdered last year, often as they slept, in Rio, Sao Paulo, all around the country."

"The people who do this, or hire the gunmen, do not see these kids as human. They see

them more like animals. They think they're just 'putting them down'."

On 23 July 1993, a policeman approached a group of children sleeping outside the downtown Candelaria church with what appeared to be a bowl of soup. But he pulled a gun from the bowl and opened fire. Several other police officers appeared and did the same, according to witnesses.

After the massacre, many, if not most businessmen and workers in the area, said the killings were justified, blaming the children for robberies. Nine months later, an advertisement in a newspaper in the town of Londrina, apparently financed by businessmen, carried the

headline: "Kill a Child Criminal." The editor said it was aimed only at intimidating street children after they were blamed for robberies, including that of the editor's bicycle.

As for child prostitution, the Brazilian President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, this month launched a campaign against it, partly due to Dr Bezerra's pressure. "Cardoso was very upset by what I was saying. I'd become a real pain in the ass."

"I'd told him denouncing things was not enough. It's no good telling people to call emergency number 190 to denounce a child brothel when that same number is inundated by callers complaining that their cat's stuck up a tree."

"Besides, even if the police take action, they'll close the whorehouse but who looks after the girls? Some girls sell their bodies in the streets to survive. Others are exploited in their homes. Brazilian women in the slums change their partners regularly. When the latest partner fires of the old lag, he turns to the daughter of seven or eight. To him she's much more tasty."

"Prostitution among little boys is probably worse," Dr Bezerra said. "We've had boys as young as five with venereal diseases or Aids. The girls will sell themselves for two or three dollars, the boys for one. One of the problems is that street boys tend to have only homosexual

relationships among themselves until they're around 13. So they start prostituting themselves early."

President Cardoso said recently that forced child labour affects 3 million children aged between 10 and 14. The government's National Statistics Office cites a figure of 7 million, or around 10 per cent of the workforce, but that figure includes children up to 17.

In most Brazilian states, one in seven children between 10 and 13 is forced to work, according to a leading sociologist, Herbert de Souza, who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaign against poverty. "In some northern states, that figure is nearly

one-in-three. The structure of slavery from our colonial past remains intact."

Dr Bezerra said a spate of kidnappings of children in Rio was partly to find child labour but mostly for prostitution. "My group is currently searching for 26 missing girls aged between 9 and 12, kidnapped between their shanty homes and shops. They're usually mulatto (mixed race) girls, sold mostly to coffee farmers and wealthy landowners. They want virgins because of the increasing incidence of Aids," she said.

"We found one girl, Samantha, aged 12, 550 miles from here, after someone recognised a picture we'd put on television. She'd been abused and addicted to drugs, including heroin. One of the problems now is getting her and her mother to readapt to each other after the new life she has lived."

In the tiny hut she has turned into kitchen, school and community centre, beneath a motorway flyover at Coqueirinho, Dr Bezerra sat cross-legged to teach "her" children, mostly black, of their roots. Some had come running to her. Others she had to fetch from alcoholic mothers who kept them padlocked in the family hut.

On the nearby kerb, Ayrton, the driver, was doubling as a doctor. Sitting on the back of Dr Bezerra's car, he poured disinfectant over the gory stumps of two of a screaming, middle-aged woman's fingers. Badly cut also on the face, she had been attacked by her partner.

"These kids' inborn image of themselves is one of slaves," Dr Bezerra said, as a couple of dozen children clutched mugs of cocoa and buttered bread rolls. "I teach them that they came from Africa, a land where their ancestors were kings and queens. When a man has no pride in his ancestors he has nothing. I tell them that they helped build this country, that they have rights."

As she read to them, she cuddled six-year-old Filipi. "When we found he had syphilis, we discovered he'd been raped by a man six months ago," she said. "They yearn for affection. That's all we can give them. We can't even give them hope."

Transylvanian cheat plots return

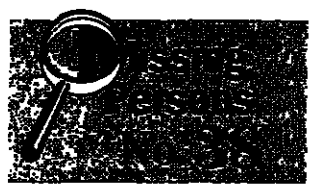
Ion Stoica is a man who believes you can fool some of the people all of the time. Three years ago he persuaded 4 million Romanians to invest about \$1bn (£600m) in a pyramid scheme that at first paid handsome dividends but then went bankrupt.

The collapse of the Caritas pyramid was a tragedy for hundreds of thousands who had entrusted their life's savings to it. For Stoica, who went from being the most loved to the most despised man in Romania, it ended in a six-year jail term.

Quite enough humiliation, one would have thought, to put most people off get-rich-quick schemes. But not Stoica. In prison in the Transylvanian city of Cluj, where he has been confined for more than a year, the former bookkeeper is plotting a comeback.

Things are running his way. Earlier this month, the Cluj Court of Appeal cut four years off Stoica's sentence, on the grounds that there was no proof that he intended to embezzle funds. Mr Stoica hopes another appeal will result in him not having to serve the remaining 11 months of his sentence.

When he does get out, he plans to take on the government, pressing for the reimbursement of the millions paid in tax while money was pouring in to the Caritas coffers. If he gets it, he promises to dish it out to those owed money from the



Ion Stoica

scheme. Then he hopes to start the whole cycle over again.

"This system worked and should have functioned longer," he said, shortly before his arrest.

"But the press brought us down the press was the force that hit Caritas like a beast."

Although sceptical about pyramid schemes, Romania's media shared in an initial sense of wonder at the extraordinary events that followed the launch of Caritas in Cluj in June 1992.

After receiving the blessing of the ultra-nationalist mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar, the scheme took off. Within weeks, almost everybody in Cluj had bought a stake, lured by the promise of eight-fold returns within three months.

The pyramid's fame spread throughout the country, which was suffering three-digit inflation. In 1993 thousands of Romanians flocked to Cluj to invest anything they could.

When the going was good, it was very good. Those that got in at the beginning reaped riches. Cluj boomed, and property prices rocketed. Caritas money



financed memorials commemorating the Romanian struggle against Hungarian rule.

When it collapsed, in late 1993, speculation mounted that Caritas had been a front for a massive money-laundering

operation, involving drugs and gun-running. Millions of Romanians were angry and felt duped by its founder. Some spoke of lynching Stoica. In fact, protest quickly fizzled out. When the Cluj Court of Appeal announced Stoica would be free in less than a year, there was barely a murmur of dissent.

Many in the city have made small fortunes, and they want to let matters lie. Unlike Stoica, however, most would be wary about jumping on to another Caritas bandwagon.

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Nigeria's religions marching as to war

David Orr finds northern Christians and Muslims ready to do battle

Kano — The Church of the Brethren in the northern Nigerian city of Kano appears neither beautiful nor of great permanence. It was built from rusty sheets of corrugated iron, its pews and altar knocked together from planks of wood.

But that it should stand at all is a source of satisfaction to its pastor, the Rev Audu Drambi. Three times in the four years the church has been destroyed. It was first burned down after Muslim youths rioted against the visit of a German evangelical preacher, Reinhard Bonnke, in 1991. Two years ago it was bulldozed by the city planners, whose motives, Mr Drambi believes, were primarily anti-Christian.

In May this year religious riots broke out again in Kano. What started as a dispute between two people over a stolen bag blew up into a three-day street battle in which scores of Christians and Muslims were killed and hundreds injured.

At this time, the Church of the Brethren, in the Muslim Brigade area of the city, once more fell victim to rampaging Muslim youths, as did Mr Drambi's house, which had already been burned down in 1991. "I'm afraid it could happen again," he said. "There's a lot of tension between Christians and Muslims in this town. My family and congregation has suffered, but I don't want to take revenge."

The rhetoric of the Very Rev Samuel Uche, the Methodist Bishop of Kano, is not so conciliatory. He has joined a government-sponsored forum to promote dialogue between Kano's two faiths. But should Muslims attack Christians once more, he is ready to respond. "If 20 people come to kill me I will gun down 10 of them before they get me," the bishop says. "All the Christian churches of Kano have mobilised since May. This time I have guns to protect myself."



Cost of faith: Rev Audu Drambi outside his burned home Photograph: David Orr

In comparison to Islam, Christianity is a newcomer to the region. Long before Christian missionaries started to convert the south, Islam came to the north via the gold and salt trading routes of the Sahara.

In the early part of this century the first Christians, railway workers and office personnel in the colonial administration, reached Kano. Like many northern towns, Kano has a history of ethnic and religious

conflict which stretches back to the early years of independence from Britain in 1960. In the mid-1960s, northern troops massacred southern immigrants out of resentment of their prominence in commerce.

In 1980 more than 4,000 people are thought to have died after a radical Muslim cleric urged his followers to rise up against everything "un-Islamic" in Kano. Moderate Muslims were horrified at the violence, which was only quelled by the army.

Since then Kano has gained a reputation as a hot-bed of Islamic fundamentalism. This was consolidated by an incident last December in which a Christian, alleged to have defiled the Koran, was beheaded by a mob. The man, against whom no evidence was found in court, was dragged out of a prison, some say with the complicity of the warders. After the lynching, his head was paraded round the streets of the city on a stake.

The most recent outbreak of violence saw not only the destruction of Mr Drambi's church and home but the burning of Christian businesses near the market. On this occasion Christians fought back, and many of the victims of the disturbances were Muslim.

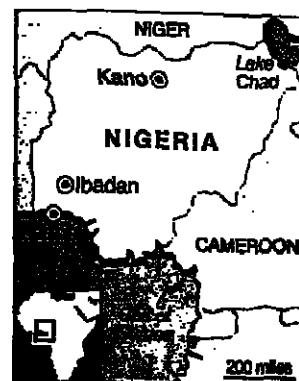
Today the streets where the riots occurred are the normal bustling, filthy, crowded streets

of Kano's commercial area. But the tensions in this city of 3 million inhabitants are not far beneath the surface. Both the Christian minority and the Muslim majority fears unrest will erupt again.

"Islam is a religion of peace", says Abdulkarim Dabaiyabu, whose tiny mosque lies inside the crumbling walls of the Old City. "It is the government which is inciting hooligans to take part in attacks in the name of Islam. The military government has used many religious leaders to divide the masses, to distract them from the economic problems and cover up the politicians' corruption."

From a southern Christian who feels disenfranchised by the country's northern Muslim establishment, such an analysis might not be surprising: from a northern Muslim, his views appear very radical.

Sheikh Aminudeen Abubakar also believes the military regime, which seized power in November 1993, uses religion to create conflict. But he is less ready to let the Christian community off the hook. "The



Christian leaders are teaching their followers that their only enemy is a Muslim", he says. "They're trying to stir up violence and fanaticism against the Muslims because leadership is in the hands of the Muslims in the north."

Christian leaders in Kano say the federal government refuses to grant land for the building of churches, that only Muslims enjoy access to the media, and that Christians are discriminated against in the fields of employment and education. Thus are the lines of conflict drawn. It is rumoured in Kano's Muslim quarters that most Christians have guns. Whatever goodwill exists between the two communities, it seems little provocation will be needed to rekindle religious hatred in Nigeria's interior.

IN BRIEF

Election pushes Swiss closer to Europe

Bern — Switzerland's most pro-European party seemed set to emerge the biggest winner in national parliamentary elections expected to gauge the mood toward integration with the rest of continent. Early returns and television projections showed that the left-of-centre Social Democrats were likely to become the biggest faction in the four-party coalition government. The two centrist coalition parties — the Christian Democrats and the Radical Democrats — appeared to be losing ground.

Juppé quits subsidised flat

Paris — The French prime minister, Alain Juppé, has moved out of the subsidised Paris flat which almost cost him his job, writes Mary Dejevsky. Removal vans arrived at the address, 26 rue Jacob, in an exclusive part of the Latin Quarter, at the weekend. Mr Juppé and his wife, Isabelle, who is expecting a baby in the next two weeks, are moving into the three-bedroom private quarters of the prime minister's official residence, the Matignon, while they set about the task of looking for a new flat.

'People's victory'

Abidjan — Ivory Coast voters, protected by troops, cast their ballots in an election boycotted by the opposition and threatened with disruption. "It's a victory for the people because the people have voted," said President Henri Konan Bedie (right) who is certain of victory. Mr Bedie faces only one opponent, Francis Wodje, leader of the small Ivorian Workers' Party, who broke ranks with allies to contest the election.



Parents stage park protest for dissident

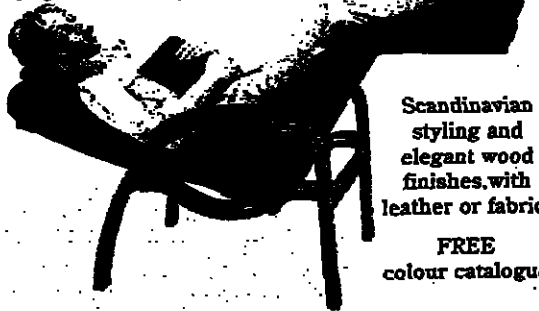
Peking — The parents and wife of Chinese dissident Chen Ziming staged a protest in a park in Peking to demand his release on medical parole. "They have not allowed me to hold a march," Wu Yongfen told reporters as she held a picture of her son. "So we are holding a protest in a park."

Cricket captain denies insulting Islam

Hyderabad — India's cricket captain, Mohammed Azharuddin, facing Muslim wrath, denied that he wrote the Prophet's name on unholily footwear while modelling for Reebok. "I have signed a contract with the Reebok company, but I haven't autographed or signed on the shoes," he said.

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SPD suffers humiliating setback in Berlin poll

IMRE KARACS
Bonn

Germany's Social Democrats suffered a humiliating setback yesterday in elections to the Berlin regional assembly, recording their lowest share of the vote since the war.

According to early projections, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats came first, with 37.2 per cent of the vote. The SPD came a poor second, scoring 25.8 per cent, down from 30.4 per cent obtained in the first elections in the reunited city, in 1990. The SPD can to some extent blame the Party of Democratic Socialism, successors to the Communists, which emerged as by far the biggest party in the eastern half of the city, with an impressive 35 per cent. Its figure for the whole of Berlin was just over 14 per cent, the same as the resurgent Greens.

his mark in Bonn. Although the fall of the Wall changed the arithmetic, Berlin is still a city where the non-Communist left should do well. Unemployment, at 250,000 out of a population of 3.5 million, remains high, despite a building boom.

The administration elected yesterday will be in charge of moving the national government back to the former Prussian capital. The SPD would love to have been the midwife at the birth of the Berlin Republic in 2000, and now that dream is shattered. Nor will it have a role on the national stage if the current defeats continue. After failing narrowly to oust Mr Kohl in last year's general elections, the Social Democrats have plunged into despair.

Riven by ideological infighting similar to that which blighted the British Labour Party in the 1990s, the SPD has also been cursed by poor leadership. In Mr Scharping, they have found a highly eligible scapegoat, but the alternatives for the leadership do not seem particularly alluring. The front-runner is Oskar Lafontaine, who so fatally misjudged the national mood on reunification in 1990.

The dearth of personalities was evident in the Berlin campaign. The SPD fielded the little-known Ingrid Stahmer as its candidate for mayor; her uninspired slogan was: "Women's Choice".

Ms Stahmer was up against the CDU incumbent, Eberhard Diepgen, who almost managed to look and sound like his party leader in Bonn. Both Mr Kohl and Mr Scharping turned up in Berlin - a double blow for Ms Stahmer, who complained about having to campaign "up-hill and into a headwind".

But not all that happened in Berlin went in Mr Kohl's favour. The Free Democrats, the CDU's coalition partners in the national government, crashed out of yet another regional assembly by failing to clear the 5-per-cent threshold. This was their 12th defeat in a row, raising doubts about their ability to get into the national parliament in the 1998 general elections.



Scharping: Battle to oust SPD leader will intensify

The result is certain to intensify the struggle to oust Rudolf Scharping, the SPD's embattled leader. Although the Social Democrats seem set to remain the CDU's junior partners in the coalition governing Berlin, failure to score well in their former power base seriously undermines the party's credibility nationwide.

It was in West Berlin that Willy Brandt reigned supreme in the 1960s as governing mayor, gaining more than 60 per cent of the vote, before making

Palestinians' boat ordeal nears end

ROBERT FISK
Beirut

The 10-day odyssey of the Palestinians stranded aboard the *Courtesy M* ferryboat after their expulsion from Libya, drew near its close last night as two Syrian vessels - one of them a warship - took all but a handful of the 650 men, women and children from Cyprus to the Syrian port of Lattakia.

Jordan was reported to have agreed to take at least 12 of the remainder, although several Palestinians were said to have smashed up the café aboard the ferry boat which brought them from Libya because they feared what would happen to them on their arrival in Syria.

The *Courtesy M*, lacking sufficient lifejackets and rafts for its passengers, its deck rails unsafe and its electrical wiring judged insufficient for a seaworthy craft by the Cyprus authorities, was allowed to dock

alongside the Syrian ferry boat *Fayza* in Larnaca harbour to transfer its first load of Palestinians. Expelled from their homes and property in Libya - dispossessed as surely as were their fathers and grandfathers by the Israelis - none of the Palestinians will be able to return to Tripoli or Benghazi, even though some had lived there for more than 20 years.

The majority held Syrian residents' documents and greeted the news of their final departure to Syria by singing and banging home-made drums. Many waved Syrian flags. But at least 1,000 other Palestinians are still waiting forelornly on the Libyan-Egyptian border after their expulsion by Colonel Gaddafi - allegedly to demonstrate the futility of the latest PLO-Israeli agreement - and at least one baby is reported to have died in the squalid desert camp on the Libyan side of the frontier.

Legal grilling for OJ as families claim damages

TIM CORNWELL
Washington

OJ Simpson, acquitted in court of the murders of his former wife Nicole and her friend, Ronald Goldman, faces questioning next week by lawyers acting for the families of the victims in a civil suit against him.

Mr Simpson returned to his Los Angeles home by private jet from Florida on Saturday. He denied plans to marry the model Paula Barbieri, who met him in Florida.

The former football star did not testify in his own defence at trial, but cannot safely plead the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination in the civil cases, most legal experts believe. He is scheduled to answer questions in a first pre-trial interview on 30 October.

Mr Simpson's former father-in-law, Louis Brown, has sued him for killing his daughter with "malice aforethought", claiming he "left her on the

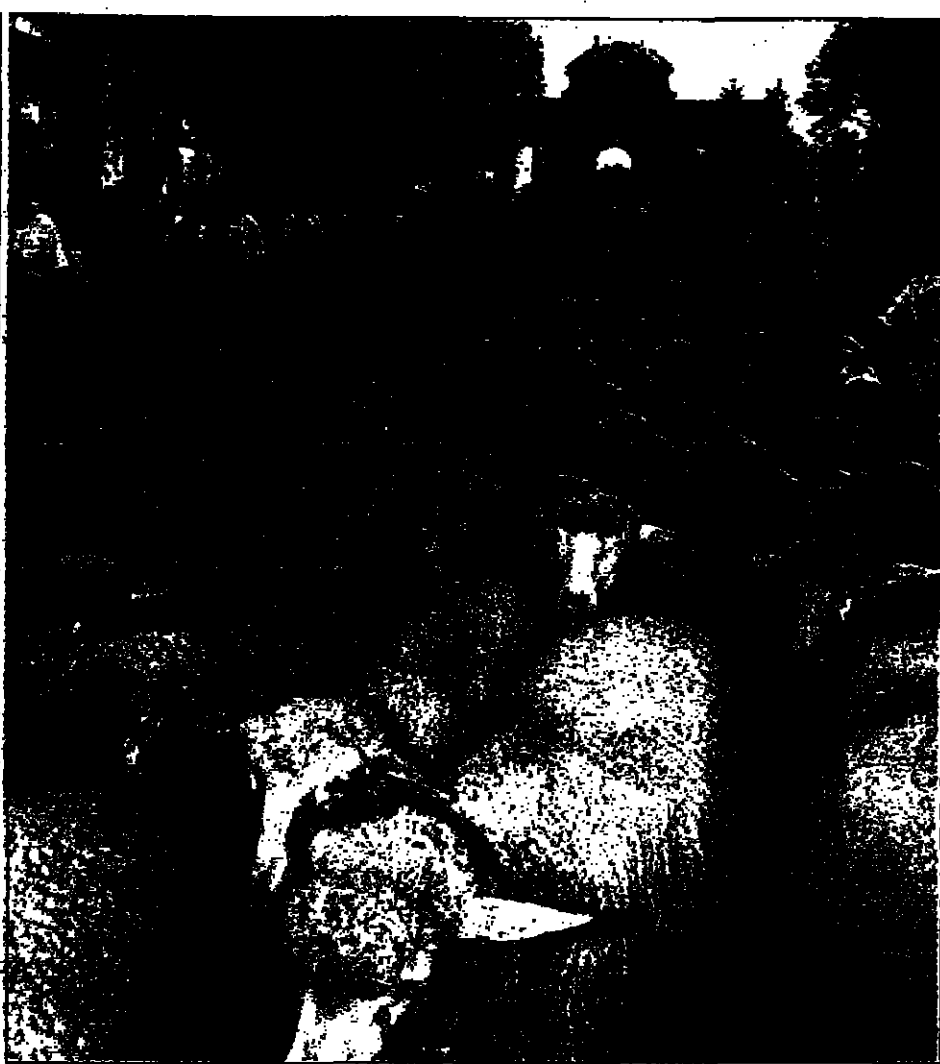
walkway in front of her residence to die".

In two separate law suits, the mother and father of Goldman, a waiter, allege Mr Simpson killed him with "vicious and outrageous savagery". All three are claiming damages which could run into millions of dollars.

Mr Simpson's attorneys say because of his acquittal he cannot face punitive damages, which jurors typically use to impose the biggest awards. They have not indicated whether he will meet the families' attorneys.

One of the defence team, F Lee Bailey, said there was "not a single question" Mr Simpson was not ready to answer.

A wealthy celebrity defendant whose case is often compared to Mr Simpson's, Claus von Bülow, was sued for \$56m (£36m) by his step-children after being acquitted in 1985 of the attempted murder of his former wife. He agreed to abandon any claim to her fortune and the case was dropped.



Flock power: Merino sheep invading the heart of Madrid during the revival of a traditional livestock migration along ancient paths

National Front brought to account in Toulon

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

France's extreme-right National Front might be removed from power in the southern port city of Toulon after election accounts were rejected by the official scrutineer on a technicality.

Toulon gave the Front a signal victory in June, when it became the first French city of more than 100,000 inhabitants to elect an extreme-right council.

The regional election authorities in Nice have instituted further inquiries to determine whether the offence is such as to force a election rerun. An alternative would be for the mayor, Jean-Marie Le Chevallier, to be barred from office for a year.

As many as 135 of the thousand or so new mayors elected in June have had their victories queried, mostly in connection with overspending or dubious bookkeeping, but the National Front's alleged offence in Toulon is different. The party is said to have breached a regulation that bars the person named as election accounts officer from standing in the electoral list. In Toulon, the man responsible for the Front's elec-

tion accounts, Jean-Claude Poulet-Dachary, was also the fifth name in the Front's list of candidates. He subsequently became head of the mayor's office and, in effect, his number two.



Mayor Le Chevallier: Could be barred from office

Toulon voters are reported to be up in arms, seeing the scrutineer's move as an attempt by Paris to deprive the Front of a democratically won victory.

The Chirac government does not hide its dislike of the extreme right and has already intervened in another Front-won council, the city of Orange, stepping in to fund a multicultural song-festival that the new council had refused to support.

In all, the Front's experience of elected office has not proved

easy. In Toulon, the rejection of its election accounts exacerbates an already difficult situation. In August, the same Mr Poulet-Dachary whose responsibility for the accounts has been queried was found dead in mysterious circumstances in the hallway of his block of flats.

While Mr Poulet-Dachary was known to have been subject to death threats and a murder inquiry was announced, his death brought out details of his private life as a militant homosexual which compromised the Front's claims to being beyond moral reproach. It also highlighted divisions in the Front's local and national branches, where he had been a controversial figure, and prompted renewed in-fighting among those competing for the succession to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Front's leader.

The fact that Mr Poulet-Dachary combined the roles of treasurer and candidate also exposes one of the Front's key problems now that it enjoys elected power: its serious lack of officials with administrative experience. Mr Poulet-Dachary, a former Foreign Legion officer, with an impeccable academic record and years of administrative experience, was one of few so qualified.

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SKOOOSH

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We must

t) Martin, Sally and Philip, in
Photograph: Thames Television

Most of us live in cities and constantly plot our escape.

But now, rural interests are resisting the invaders

We must end this war of town v country

"Too many broken eggs and not enough omelettes," was JB Priestley's gloomy verdict on the planning blight he witnessed on his *English Journey* in the Thirties, appalled at the spread of suburbia and new patterns of ribbon development blending what were once self-contained towns and cities into great conurbations of placelessness.

This horror of formlessness led to the "green belts" to mark the boundaries between town and country and prevent further attenuation of the qualities of urban - and rural - life. But once again, cities are changing and so, too, is the countryside, with radical implications as to how people will live in future. The binary opposition of urban and rural is no longer tenable or productive. But this news has not yet reached the planners or politicians.

It is likely that the settlements which will emerge in the coming decades - which may

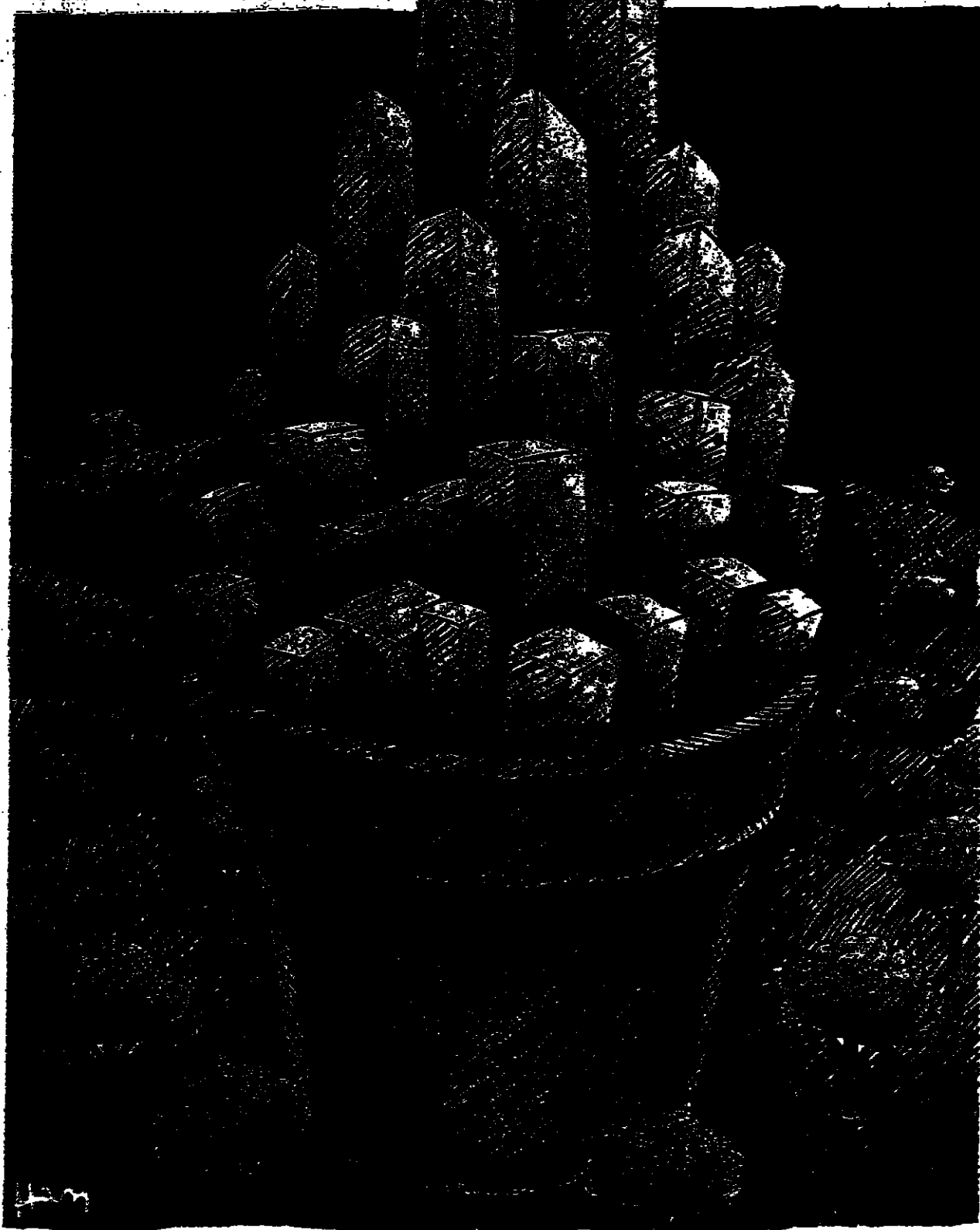
All these demographic shifts are reshaping cities, towns and villages much more than the spread of personal computers or the sales of mobile phones and modems. Last week's White Paper on rural England drew attention to some of the disturbing trends in rural poverty and social displacement as long-standing rural families and their children are priced out of local housing markets by wealthier urban incomers. Some of those young people will end up joining the army of urban homeless.

The complexity of the increasing overlap between town and country patterns and lifestyles is daunting, and in urgent need of new thinking and greater public debate. A sustainable future depends on it. We have to start by asking whether the British actually like cities or, even after 200 years of intense urbanisation, have yet come to terms with urban life. There are still major contradictions in attitudes and aspirations, for while more than 80 per cent of British people live in cities, more than two-thirds would choose to live in a small town or country village if they could, according to recent research.

Some manage to escape. In 11 cities or urban boroughs - Bristol, Bromley, Cardiff, Greenwich, Hounslow, Leicester, Merton, Middlesbrough, Sheffield, Southwark and Sutton - studied recently for the Comedia/Demos *Park Life* report on urban parks and open spaces, all suffered depopulation between 1981 and 1991. In just one decade, Bristol dropped from 438,038 to 370,300 and Southwark from 313,413 to 196,500, although both now claim to have halted the exodus.

The flight from the cities in post-war Britain has been uneven but pronounced, and would be more noticeable but for the numbers of ethnic minority immigrants who replaced those who left. Britain's black and Asian communities overwhelmingly live in cities (and within them in quite specific concentrations or districts), and are likely to be the last groups to venture into the rural hinterland - even for a day, let alone to live. It is still the case that the countryside remains "white". Racism is, of course, one of the unspoken factors that informs some people's decisions to seek the rural idyll.

However, the usual reasons are the softer "quality of life" issues rather than housing or job prospects. People fear street crime, they worry about pollution and the health of their children, and view with increasing dismay the ageing infrastructure of services



around them - pre-war schools, 19th-century hospitals, Carnegie libraries, Victorian parks fraying at the edges, privatised buses churning out diesel smoke, boarded-up department stores and shuttered high streets.

What they want are out-of-town shopping malls easily accessible by car, multi-family "leisure boxes" built on greenfield sites, country parks with car parks and interpretation centres, and modern schools to which their children can walk in safety.

The *Park Life* study showed

that city dwellers with cars preferred to visit a country park or out-of-town garden centre at the weekend than to walk to their local park; and the Council for the Protection of Rural England's report *Leisure Landscapes*, published last year, detailed the scale of the urban invasion into the countryside as a place for sport and recreation, noting that 45 per cent of all car journeys are now made for leisure purposes.

The CPRE report showed how great the pressures on the countryside are in terms of active sports and recreation, as

leisure and tourism-based jobs replace agricultural jobs and leisure woodlands and golf courses take up set-aside arable land. In 1950 there were 700,000 agricultural workers; today there are 200,000. Only 6 per cent of rural workers are now employed in agriculture.

The very notion of a working landscape, of rural life as a productive agricultural life, is now under siege as the Common Agricultural Policy and discretionary leisure spending combine to turn the countryside into a playground, heritage trail or site for new kinds of

expensive housing estates, confirming that urban and rural problems are becoming increasingly interlocked.

As was obvious at last month's National Trust centenary conference (a watershed of public heart-searching and self-criticism), an increasing part of the Trust's work in managing its rural sites and properties is in reducing rather than increasing visitors.

As a body the National Trust is quietly powerful, not just in terms of its 2 million membership but also in its extensive ownership of land and organis-

ational strength. It could park a lot of metaphorical tanks on other people's lawns, if it so wished, including the Government's.

It was obvious at the Manchester conference that the National Trust now has its eye on the urban heritage and a keen interest in urban issues, organising workshops in association with the Black Environmental Network and on a number of other city initiatives.

It is significant that the Countryside Commission, too, is beginning to make inroads into urban planning policy. Its offshoot, the Groundwork Trust, now largely works in urban areas on derelict land reclamation, and the commission has recently published a report on *Urban Trees*. Even more provocative, perhaps, was the recent launch by the CPRE of its "Urban Footprints" campaign, in favour of increased urban consolidation under the slogan: "The future of our countryside depends on our towns and cities treading more lightly on the environment."

The sub-text of this campaign could be thought to suggest, be it ever so gently, that city-dwellers should stay where they belong. Suddenly in Britain it seems that we are getting to a ridiculous situation where urban policy is being developed, by default, by rural pressure groups, some of which are keen to ensure that the urban masses stay put in their city enclaves.

Cynics might also detect a degree of opportunism in the way in which rural and landed interests are wrapping themselves in the green flag and claiming environmental reasons for keeping the countryside free of outside intruders. However, there is little that can prevent the urban rich from buying into rural life, rather than simply visiting it. The modern village or market town, certainly in the South-east, is becoming a dormitory settlement, as people work in the city but go home at night to their version of the rural idyll.

It was ever thus according to the historian Martin Wiener, whose book *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* noted how frequently the industrial masters moved to join the rural aristocracy once they had made their pile. But the urge to leave Albert Square or Coronation Street to live in Ambridge still seems a pervasive ingredient of the English dream.

The only people who claim to love cities are the families and children of immigrants who have settled here. When I recently interviewed the Guyana-born novelist Mike Phillips for a Radio 4 programme, he was effusive about the magnetism of the city: "You must

understand," he told me, "we never had the myth of a rural paradise. We embraced the city because it meant progress - material progress, intellectual progress - and educational progress."

The positive contribution that ethnic minority communities have made to British urban life remains largely unacknowledged.

The problem is, as Raymond Williams put it in *The Country and the City*, that if the countryside represents the past and the city the future, where does this leave the present? The challenge which Jonathon Porritt threw out at the National Trust conference was precisely on this issue: that the countryside has to be developed to suit modern needs. He raised the spectre of wind farms, currently a powerful symbol of rural opposition to modern life - almost wholly on aesthetic grounds. Porritt is in favour of wind farms and went on to

The urge to leave Albert Square for Ambridge seems pervasive

unnerve some of the audience by arguing that in the move to develop environmentally sustainable ways of life, "landscape is not high on the list of factors which should be taken into account".

This was always Williams's argument - that landscape was the enemy of a working rural economy - and that aesthetic arguments about rural landscapes were invariably invoked to prevent any new thinking about new ways of working and living.

But new ways of working and living are precisely what Britain needs, as more and more demographic and social pressures and conflicts come to a head both in urban and rural areas. As the boundaries between education and livelihood, between work and home, it is time to reconfigure the relations between town and country. We need planning and social policies which can provide both liveable cities and a productive, working countryside - and all the settlements and ways of life that might emerge in the spaces in between.

The author's most recent book, *Staying Close to the River: Reflections on Travel and Politics*, was published by Lawrence & Wishart earlier this year.

KEN WORPOLE

well be quite new and different versions of the inner city, town centre, suburb, edge city, waterfront, market town, urban village, tele-cottage, New Age commune - will have a greater influence on people's lives and aspirations than the global media or developments in information technology, the current front-runners in the "this is going to change the way we live for ever" stakes. Locality, increasingly, is destiny.

Social and demographic change continues to be determined more by culture than technology. There are massive processes of restructuring happening to populations in both the city and the countryside. The most important may be the overwhelming rise of single-person households, "the most pervasive trend of the Eighties", according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' journal, *Population Trends*. It is estimated that 4 million new households will emerge in the next two decades, needed for new kinds of familial and domestic relationships, and requiring more flexible kinds of housing and tenure agreements, as well as reflecting the continuing rise of the one-parent family (Britain has the highest number of any European country). There is also the impact on the countryside of nearly a quarter of a million second homes.

Diary

RUTH DUDLEY EDWARDS

I shouldn't have sat up talking until 4am, but it had been a good party and I was enjoying myself. Five hours later I was enjoying myself less, as I got ready to go on a laborious journey to observe the Ulster Unionist Party conference in Portrush (it takes two hours by crowded train to cover the 50 or so miles from Belfast). Normally, my natural ineptitude for packing poses little problem, since my assistant, Carol, is calm and practical, but on Friday morning she was out of action, for she had been at the same party and she is not as tough as I am.

A traffic warden was harassing the cab driver so I had to rush, and this helped to ensure that I forgot the transformer for my American portable printer. So I was not in the mood for the Muslim paragon who took me to the airport, explaining all the way how he and his wife led clean lives, how they never went anywhere socially except to visit relatives, how he had never touched alcohol, tobacco or any female save his wife, and how it was the role of the woman to keep a good home.

I wondered if he had noticed the general air of dishevelment that characterises my front garden, as well as the boxes and papers in my hall, and was trying to show me the better way. But he was a nice man so I didn't shock him by telling him why I was tired and had a headache.

Such experiences confirm me in my view that it should be possible - on payment of a modest extra fee - to request or reject specific types of cab driver: "silent", "evangelical" or "convivial and sympathetic man-of-the-world" are the first few categories that come to mind.

President Clinton is not my kind of chap - and not just because of the way he wears his hair - but until Saturday he had done no harm to me personally. However, when I finally found a shop in Belfast that admitted to dealing in transformers, I was told that the whole stock had just been bought by the Europa Hotel. So because Clinton, with an entourage of

500, is whizzing through Belfast on the hunt for the spurious Irish-ancestral leg of his presidential campaign next month, I was left seething and transformerless. Some anti-Clinton verse would provide balm.

Incidentally, as David Trimble, the new leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, pointed out to his followers at

dinner on Friday night, if Colin Powell is elected, there really will be an American president with distinguished Ulster ancestry. I look forward to observing Powell's effect on those pockets of Northern Ireland where people still innocently and without malice talk about "darkies".

At tea with my friend Gordon, I was served in a mug from a Brussels souvenir shop that has gone the whole hog on the old poke about hell being a place where the English are the cooks and the Germans are the lovers. "The Perfect European," it explains, should be:

Cooking like a Brit
Available as a Belgian
Flexible as a Swede
Sober as the Irish
Talkative as a Finn
Famous as a Luxembourgier
Humble as a Spaniard
Humorous as a German
Patient as an Austrian
Organised as a Greek
Driving like the French
Technical as a Portuguese
Controlled as an Italian
Discreet as a Dane.

Considering President Clinton recently had to apologise for speaking of "welshing on debts", there should be great scope for offence being taken here. Oh, and while we're at it, what do you suggest for the Scots and the Welsh - and indeed any other nationality you have in for?

Speaking of cultural characteristics, my new dentist has barnessed what remains in me of the guilt that one can never quite shake off if born both female and Irish Catholic. "Oh dear," he remarks, as he messes about the back of my teeth, "our little friend here isn't looking too happy."

So having always been no more than basically hygienic about such matters, I now feel that each little friend deserves care of the first order and spend what seems like hours on brushing-and-flossing duty. If the little chap about whom the dentist is particularly worried fails to survive, I will be distraught. How fortunate that my doctor doesn't talk like that about my liver.

George Hummer adds to our distinguished Portillo collection: *Michael Portillo*
Is not a cigarillo
The emission of smoke and smell
Comes from mention of things
Bruxelles.

However, mindful of this column's dedication to political balance, he has also given us:

Robin Cook
Is a proper little dook
He and his leader Tony Blair
Make a most ignominious pair.

"The real problem with the polylingual limerick," explains a learned new recruit, Lyndon Jones, "is the absence of marked tonic stress in the romance languages, which lend themselves altogether less well to the rhythm of the limerick than do the Germanic languages such as our own."

But he tried anyway, and I particularly liked:

"This Gashaus is glorious!" said I
Und heselle ein fünfzehntes Ei
Ma lo stomaco esplose
Après huit de rose
Helaas! Bu is mijn leven voorbij
My friend Séan MacRéamoinn, a veteran performer in this genre, offers those of you who are less gifted than Lyndon the comparatively easy exercise of finishing off: "A muchacha hermosa from Spain/In love with fear
de as [a young man from] Sinn Féin/Said 'Arriba Irlanda/But I must add, with candour..."

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Guardian Health



Hail to the transformer



Just Ulster's cup of tea

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Peter Lilley's repo men

The word "bailliff" has always had a particularly nasty connotation in English culture. It calls to mind an insensitive brute, charged by a callous authority with the task of throwing the poor and desperate out of their own houses. To liberals everywhere the news - as revealed in this newspaper today - that the Government plans to use private firms of bailiffs to collect money wrongly paid by (or claimed from) the Department of Social Security will cause alarm. Daily Express readers, however, will probably rejoice at exactly the same news, believing that at long last something is being done about the scroungers.

The problem that the Government is trying to address is certainly a big one. We have all heard about the gang frauds and seen Peter Lilley wave aloft the social security smart card that he hopes will help to suppress them. But a lot of the money is lost in more straightforward ways: claimants whose circumstances improve but who fail to advise the DSS, or where the DSS itself has simply miscalculated and paid too much. It is the job of recovering this overpayment that, in the first instance, is to be "market tested" - ie, piloted in the private sector.

In practice, this means handing over nearly 4,000 cases to each of two private debt recovery firms and evaluating how they do. So chaps whose expertise has been gained in the debt and repossession business will now be let loose on those who owe the state money. This approach is probably right - but the pilot must be handled with enormous care and subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny. There is, after all, no absolute reason why - given that such debt must be recovered - an efficient and responsible private

operation should not be employed to do it. The existence of competition in this field will probably drive up recovery rates and drive down costs. Nor does the idea of a pilot necessarily suggest (as the CPSSA, the civil servants' trade union, claims) a lack of ministerial confidence in the market testing idea. Piloting is a far more sensible thing to do than rushing headlong into privatisation - or, indeed, then simply maintaining the status quo.

But those who are employed to act on the state's behalf - particularly in an area populated both by the criminal and the genuinely unfortunate - must exercise the most careful discretion. As outlined in the memorandum written by John Coyle, boss of the Benefits Agency's debt recovery section, this discretion encompasses both style and substance. Confidentiality must be observed - despite the immense temptations to make use of information gleaned during recovery operations. Sensitivity must be employed in approaching different kinds of households, many of them troubled. These are not necessarily qualities that are linked in the public mind with the debt enforcers of documentary and news story.

The experience of the recent past, with agencies such as the Child Support Agency, Group 4 and others - while it does not support the claim that such activities must always be carried out directly by government civil servants - does indicate just how easily public confidence can be lost by clumsy or inept actions and how long it takes to regain that confidence.

And we do not wish to be told (should it all go horribly wrong) that government ministers cannot be held responsible for it because they were only involved in setting the policy.

Incey-Wincey in the sun

Hasn't it been amusing, upsetting all those Greenpeace types by telling them how much you are enjoying global warming? Yes, it is tough on the Maldives and things won't be terrific in Bangladesh, but more long, hot summers and balmy autumns here in Britain would be great for the tourist industry. And it was fun to see the pavements of this once rain-soaked and windswept island sprouting little wooden or plastic chairs and tables, as our whole society turned itself inside-out.

But now there is chilling news that looks set to spoil the sunshine party. The summer heat has encouraged the spread into these islands of ever larger house spiders from further south, has bred bigger native arachnids and has sent male spiders wild with a desire that engenders many more spiders hereafter.

To cap it all, this autumn's mild spell has encouraged heedless householders to fling open doors and windows - just at the time when these hormone-madened spiders are mate-hunting. The result? Pretty soon our basements, bathrooms and boudoirs will resound to the shrieks of horrified arachnophobes.

Unlike garden spiders with their nice colours, pretty webs and generally predictable behaviour, or bird-eating spiders with their endearing habit of living abroad and terrifying foreigners, the British house-spider seems to have been created for the express purpose of dis-

countenancing innocent British people. Though it is claimed that they prey on pests (such as house-flies), they seem to prefer just hanging out in fly-free places (such as the bath), or going for long, leisurely nocturnal rambles over duvets, up pillows and through hair. And they seem to know exactly who, in any house, is most susceptible to their company.

So, as the year draws to its close, mild arachnophobes will be sending off to mail-order firms for those strange spider-trappers on the end of a pole - and then pestering their spouses to use them. Those with greater fear will be consulting the small army of phobia counsellors who, through hypnosis, aversion therapy (gradual exposure to ever-larger and more hideous spiders) and even "virtual reality", attempt to overcome irrational terror.

However, these can only be stop-gap solutions. Either the causes of the phobia itself must be discovered and dealt with - or the conditions that give rise to all these unnecessary spiders must be reversed. If, as one scientist at Bristol University believes, our fear is chemically caused, then the day may arrive when a couple of Achno-fen taken last night at night will do the trick.

Until then, by far the simplest course of action is to campaign for a reduction in the emission of the greenhouse gases that are giving rise to global warming - and to huge, horrible spiders.

ANOTHER VIEW Kenneth Calman

Anatomy of a Pill scare

The recent warnings about certain oral contraceptives raise important issues about informing doctors and patients of the risks of their medicines. As Chief Medical Officer, I was closely involved in the decision and the subsequent action taken to make women and their doctors aware of the situation.

The overriding concern was that of public health and the safety of women taking the contraceptives in question. At no stage were financial considerations an issue.

Three independent studies, carefully reviewed by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, have demonstrated that oral contraceptives containing the progestogens, desogestrel and gestodene, are associated with twice the risk of venous thrombosis as compared with other oral contraceptives that are available. Yet the committee has been criticised for acting prematurely on the basis of as yet unpublished information.

Although the risks of oral contraceptives are small and their benefits considerable, it is clearly vital to inform women and their doctors as quickly as possible of important differences in the risks of the various types of oral contraceptives available so that they can make an informed choice.

Some doctors have been concerned that they did not receive information before coverage in the press. Considerable efforts were made to inform them. Three routes of communications were used: letters sent by first-class mail to arrive on 19 October, a fax to all direc-

tors of public health, who had been warned 12 hours beforehand to expect urgent information requiring immediate onward transmission to GPs and hospital doctors, and finally, faxes to hospital drug information pharmacists.

We regret that despite all these efforts, the broadcast media were informed - by one of the recipients of the letter, we understand - early on the morning of 19 October, before all the doctors had received the information. In reality this sort of problem cannot be avoided.

I am grateful for the way GPs and family planning doctors have responded and put the interests of women first. It is so important that we all co-operate to make this possible.

Crucially, the advice to women must be clear. The risks of all oral contraceptives are small, the risks of pregnancy far higher. If you are taking a pill not containing desogestrel or gestodene there is no cause for concern. For those who are taking oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene it is important to carry on with your current course and contact your doctor before its completion to discuss the options for change.

Such incidents will happen again and there will be a need to respond rapidly. Co-operation between the media, the professions and the department is essential to get clear public health advice speedily to those who need it.

The writer is the Government's Chief Medical Officer.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Profiting from Fred West's life

From Ms Marguerite Evers

Sir: I am amazed that the Official Solicitor, Peter Harris, is legally entitled to "sell" evidence acquired in the course of a prosecution by the Crown ("Fred West's life story sold off by government lawyer", 19 October). Surely this material is the property of the taxpayers whose security is being served by public officials of the law, and any evidence is either the public property of all or withheld on proper grounds.

That he should regard it as his "duty" to engage in a streetwise commercial deal on behalf of the family of the accused is a grotesque misinterpretation of his office. It may be an interpretation so bizarre that it does not actually fall outside his permitted activities, but Peter Harris should be prevented from carrying out this deal, and personally I should like to see him removed from office. An effective administrator needs to understand the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

Yours faithfully,

MARGUERITE EVERS

London, E14

19 October

From Dr Alan Bullen

Sir: The Official Solicitor to the Fred West estate is poised to sell the film rights to Hollywood and has apparently hawked the book rights to the highest bidder (reports, 20 October).

But why stop there? I am fully expecting a CD, T-shirts and a TV game show. Participants could dominate the actor most likely to play West in the biopic.

For once, I agree with John Major. It is not only extremely distasteful, but also an act of cynical exploitation, which can only cause yet more distress to the families of the victims.

All concerned in this tawdry little project should feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves. They should examine their consciences and ask whether prurience should be used to create yet more profit and pain.

Yours faithfully,

ALAN BULLEN

Tunbridge Wells

20 October

Better for verse

From Mr Peter Forbes

Sir: Michael Glover's Eeyorish account of the parlous state of some poetry publishers' lists ("The problem with poetry", 10 October) should not go unchallenged.

Mr Glover omits any mention of the acknowledged market leaders: Faber, Bloodaxe and Penguin. Here are some figures given to me by Faber yesterday: Auden, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, 165,000; Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems*, 73,000; Larkin, *The Whitsun Weddings*, 260,000.

Further examples from other publishers: *Poems on the Underground* has done more than 100,000; Betjeman's *Collected Poems* has sold almost 2 million; and poets such as Seamus Heaney, Tony Harrison and Wendy Cope sell in the tens of thousands.

So why does Mr Glover focus entirely on publishers who simply aren't very good at selling poetry?

Yours sincerely,

PETER FORBES

Editor

Poetry Review

The Poetry Society

London, WC2

A church in partnership with its congregation

From Mr Geoffrey Ellis

Sir: One can sympathise with the Rev Kit Chalcraft (Another View: "Priests for the people", 18 October) for having lost his job, though from all accounts he was at least partly to blame, but he should not use your columns to make inaccurate observations on the current role of the laity in the Church of England.

In the parish in a neighbouring diocese we are coming to the end of an interregnum; a new parish priest joins us in January. From the start the parish, through the Parochial Church Council, was given every opportunity to decide who should minister to us. We drew up a "parish profile", which was discussed at a meeting with our suffragan bishop, the archdeacon and the rural dean, to ensure that they and ourselves knew the type of person we felt suitable.

The church warden were then delegated by the PCC to interview and recommend a new incumbent for appointment by the diocesan bishop. Although

one might criticise the time the whole process has taken, at no time was any pressure put on us by any authority in the church to accept or refuse any candidate. We were perhaps additionally fortunate in being a single-parish country benefice, so there were no other parishes to consult and the choice may therefore have been made simpler.

I do not know how the selection procedure in our diocese compares with that of Norwich, but Mr Chalcraft's statement that "it is time that the church involved its people responsibly" needs amending. We are involved; we accept the responsibility; we know that our church must become increasingly a partnership between clergy and laity.

Yours faithfully,

GEOFFREY ELLIS

Great Barton,

Suffolk

19 October

From The Rev John Young

Sir: Without wishing to endorse all Kit Chalcraft's conclusions, I

Classic FM's serious approach

From Mr John Spearman

Sir: I have listened to Radio 3 since I was a child. I regard it with a mixture of great affection and periodic irritation. The latter is usually provoked by the disappearance of programmes I particularly enjoyed, such as the *Morning Concert* and *Music Weekly*. It is because of this that I feel considerable sympathy for Nicholas Kenyon, the controller of Radio 3.

It seems to me that he is the victim of the ambivalent attitude of a wide cross-section of listeners, including myself. There is understanding, if not enthusiasm, for his desire to increase the audience of Radio 3, but also deep reservations among listeners about the method, particularly if it impinges on their personal affections. It is difficult or him to win.

But I must now take issue with a comment of Mr Kenyon's ("From where I stand: Nicholas Kenyon", 17 October). He described Classic FM as an "excel-

lent commercial service with no responsibility to musical life other than to deliver listeners to advertisers". This is simply untrue.

Classic FM takes its responsibility very seriously. We seek to promote the enjoyment and appreciation of serious music by all ages and across all sections of the community. Classic encourages young musicians by providing broadcast platforms to reflect their music, lives and careers. The Classic Charitable Trust raises funds for music education, while we maintain close links with all the national orchestras, particularly the Royal Philharmonic, which receives substantial direct and indirect financial support through its association with the station.

We are continually seeking opportunities to entertain and enlighten our audiences with performances they may not have heard before, but which might delight them.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN SPEARMAN

Chief Executive

Classic FM

London, NW1

18 October

Parish the thought

From Mr Paul Claydon

Sir: You mentioned briefly in your letter of 18 October ("The dream of Gummerus") that parish councils were being given some more powers in the area of community transport.

In fact, the Rural White Paper goes much further. It provides a clear endorsement of the importance of parish councils in representing local communities and contains a firm promise to develop their role in responding to the needs and priorities of local people. For too long parish councils have been a neglected tier of local government. A recognition of their worth and potential by central government is long overdue.

The association, as the representative body for parish councils in England (and community councils in Wales), will seek to ensure that the Government keeps its promise.

Yours faithfully,

PAUL CLAYDON

National Association of

Local Councils

London, WC1

Behaviour of MPs

From Dr John Beaven

Sir: Nothing demonstrates more the need for an independent ethical body to scrutinise the behaviour of MPs and government ministers than the row regarding the Home Secretary's alleged conduct regarding the dismissal of the director of prisons.

That the Home Secretary would be "cleared" by his Conservative parliamentary colleagues was not in doubt. Neither was it likely that the truth would emerge about the allegations in Parliament.

This has left the Home Secretary in a weakened position with an inadequate opportunity to clear his name, should he be innocent of all allegations made against him. An independent ethical body would address these issues, remove the party points-scoring system of "justice" regarding alleged misconduct of Members of Parliament and restore public confidence in our politicians.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN BEAVEN

Glossop, Derbyshire

Bloomsbury arts not elitist

From Mr Richard Shone

Sir: Polly Tynbee writes that politicians who are outraged by funding "elitist" arts from the lottery are out of touch with the times ("Politicians are the true philistines", 18 October). She goes on to castigate Bloomsbury as having been, between the wars, a leading contributor to the schism in Britain between culture and the population at large. It is Ms Tynbee who is out of touch in peddling a viewpoint that has long been discredited.

Surely the Arts Council, since its foundation in the Forties, has brought the arts over the past 50 years within reach of a previously unimaginable number of people across the whole nation? The idea for the Arts Council, as everyone must know by now, was Lord Keynes's and sprang from the very heart of Bloomsbury.

Earlier, in the Twenties, Keynes, Roger Fry and Duncan Grant were closely involved in the London Artists' Association in order to bring contemporary art, through London and regional exhibitions, to the eyes and homes of people who might have thought "modern" pictures beyond their taste and purse.

When Leonard Woolf ran the Hogarth Press, he introduced several series of softbacked, cheaply priced books specifically to reach readers of modest means. The views put forward in Virginia Woolf's polemical writings on women and education and those propounded in several essays by Fry and EM Forster depicting the snobbish, restrictive views of the so-called "cultured classes" appear to me almost exactly contrary to Ms Tynbee's allegations.

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD SHONE

London, SW1

20 October

From Mr Quentin Bell

Sir: Polly Tynbee tells us that the Bloomsbury group "encouraged lesser mortals to think that art was not for them".

Maynard Keynes, a central figure in Bloomsbury, became chairman of the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts in 1942, and transformed that body into the Arts Council. I suppose Ms Tynbee thinks that was "just for toffs".

Yours faithfully,

QUENTIN BELL

Fife,

Sussex

19 October

Alcohol in France

From Ms Toni Brisby

Sir: David Lister (Diary, 17 October) draws the wrong conclusion from the fact that alcohol-related public order offences are much lower in France. There are a number of possible explanations for this, the most likely being that some cultures (such as ours) expect people to get rowdy when they are drunk, while other cultures expect them to stay relatively quiet.

What Mr Lister fails to realise is that deaths from liver disease in France run at roughly 10 times

the rate of deaths from the same cause in the UK (although rates of cirrhosis in France are starting to fall because of an intensive, and expensive, health education campaign), as do virtually all the other alcohol-related problems.

It is a myth that the French know how to manage alcohol. They drink more than we do and they suffer more ill-effects from it than we do. Teaching little children to drink as a matter of routine simply increases the number of adults with alcohol problems.

Yours faithfully,

TONI BRISBY

Stafford

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, The Independent, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL and include a daytime telephone number. (Fax: 0171-293 2456; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret that we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

comment

Who gives a good cause a bad name?

Tory tabloids are frothing themselves into a lather over today's lottery grants to useful small charities

We have been waiting now for almost a year for the Charities Board to make its first allocations of lottery money, and there has been some impatience for today's announcement. That is partly because many people who support the large capital sums given to the arts believe those awards will not seem scandalous once the whole lottery scheme is in place. That includes the Millennium Fund grants but, above all, it means today's allocation of money to charities. Once they start receiving their share, the sums allocated to arts and heritage will be seen in context.

Well, that's what I thought, and what I was arguing until yesterday. Then along came the *Mail* or *Sunday* and the *Sunday Express*, with their outraged discovery that, out of the £40m to be distributed today, "there is £170,000 for the Scottish Council on Alcohol and grants totalling £70,000 for other drugs projects".

The Scottish Council on Alcohol! I take it that this is not, as it were, the Whisky Marketing Board but, rather, a council concerned with problems arising from the excessive consumption of alcohol in Scotland. Why will there be "anger" at such a grant? Who precisely is going to be outraged at the allocation of cash to "an advice centre for the parents of drug addicts in Glasgow"?

The first sentence of the *Express* story is a marvellous example of that paper's technique with the facts: "Drug addicts, refugees, single moth-

ers, alcoholics and ethnic groups are to get National Lottery grants totalling hundreds of thousands of pounds. No, drug addicts are not going to get these grants. Organisations that deal with them are. One can hardly think of a more traditional area of charitable work than alcohol and drug addiction, single mothers and refugees.

The *Mail* story focused its outrage on a grant of £90,000 that will go to the Eritrean Advice and Information Centre, described as being based "in a cramped room above a parade of shops in Stockwell Road, south London" (an upstairs room is always a bit sinister) and which gives advice to 7,000 Eritreans about housing, immigration and social security matters, including helping people fill in application forms.

Once again, here we have a description of a typical charity in action, helping people, in this case, to receive the benefits to which they are entitled as refugees. Keeping them off the streets. Getting them established in the legitimate world. Giving them a fresh start in life. Sounds sensible, doesn't it?

The *Mail*, in its opinion column, made a distinction between, on the one hand, the pet causes of the rich (the opera) and the obscure politically correct groups such as the Eritrean centre and, on the other, "the charities which work their hearts out for ordinary people" - which are depicted as the losers. So the toffs in the crush bar (most of them *Mail* readers, I always think) and the volunteers in



JAMES FENTON

These attacks are always framed as if taxpayers' money is being squandered

cramped upstairs rooms in Stockwell from one class - the villains - while the injured parties are... who? Charities that work for ordinary people? What could be more ordinary than the problems parents have in Glasgow when their children turn to drugs?

As examples of those losing out, the *Mail* cited groups fighting cancer, diabetes or asthma. I hope that the people working in such groups will repudiate the attempt to put enmity between them and the kinds of charity that have benefited in the first round of grants, which was consciously directed towards the theme of "communities, families and individuals disadvantaged by low income". One can believe it wrong to exclude medical research from future causes

to be supported, without following the *Mail* in exhorting, for instance, a "handout" to the Vietnamese Mental Health Project, clearly a group concerned with the long-term effects of psychological trauma.

I was talking to an old Tory politician the other day, who was inveighing against the modern demand for counselling. In his day, he said (and by his day he meant the Second World War), nobody expected counselling, nor did they get it. I replied that I thought this a pity. For instance, I understood that there was not only the question of the trauma suffered by soldiers but also, at the end of the war, there had been widespread psychological reactions among housewives. Once the tension of the war was over, they tended to collapse or show symptoms of depression.

What counselling would attempt, in these circumstances, would be at least to try to explain to these women that there were others in the same condition, that the aftermath of the war might continue to be felt in ways that one might not have predicted, and so forth. It was better, I thought, to be counselled than to suffer alone.

My companion heard me out patiently, and I could see he knew exactly what I was talking about. But in the end he reverted to his point: there was too much counselling going on.

There was a terrible story, not long ago, of a Vietnamese boy who had been adopted here by a very good family, had studied diligently and fulfilled

his ambition, which was to become a soldier. But then, of a sudden, he shot himself. The trauma, I suppose, had proved too much for him.

I don't say that the Vietnamese Mental Health Project would have been able to help this young man. But it might, by telling others about such cases, help them to understand what is happening when depression hits them, when it hits them years after the event. So it would appear that among the groups receiving grants today there are people who give long-term psychological assistance to traumatised Vietnamese and people who, from a cramped upstairs room in Stockwell Road, give practical advice and support to Eritreans. I shall read the rest of the list with interest. It sounds as if it will furnish quite an insight into the world of the small charities.

One might add that these attacks are always framed as if, when lottery money is allocated, it is "taxpayers' money" that is being squandered. But the money spent on the lottery has nothing to do with taxes, however much members of the Government would like to turn it into a tax substitute. The sums that have been spent so far have gone only in the directions laid down when the lottery was founded. There was a deal: the nation would get the lottery, and the good causes would get the benefit. The criteria for spending lottery money are and should be different from Conservative Party expenditure priorities. Or those, of course, of the Tory tabloids.

Sixteen nuns and an umbrella

"I was in Rome last week," I said, as I took my foaming pint from the landlord and paused in order to get people's attention before launching into my travel tale.

It was a fatal move. The man beside me in the pub stirred and said:

"I was in Rome briefly 10 years ago. I had an unfortunate encounter with a party of nuns, one of whom still writes to me regularly with marriage proposals."

Everyone turned away from me, towards him.

"Has anyone here been to St Peter's Square?" said the man. "I was there only last week."

I said, but no one paid me any heed. "It's a huge concourse," he said, "a great open space like an airport terminal, because wherever you look there are different groups moving about, crisscrossing each other like trains in the dark, but they are not looking for their plane departure: they are looking for their coach, or their next cup of tea, or their guide, or the lavatory, or maybe simply the way out."

"Anyway, I was all by myself and I had taken my umbrella along because it looked like rain, and at one point I was walking, holding it up and shaking it, and I suddenly realised that I was being followed by 16 nuns. I stopped. They stopped. I started. They followed me. Have you ever had the feeling you're being followed? I know that feeling. It's an especially strong feeling when there are 16 nuns after you."

"Why were you being followed by them?" asked someone.

"That's obvious," I said. "If you have been to St Peter's, as I was last week, you will notice that all the group leaders have some sort of rallying object held up in the air. Actually, a funny thing happened to me..."

"Often it is a walking stick," said the man, "or a red umbrella. Anything to let the group spot the tour guide from a long way off, if they have strayed away. Obviously the nuns mistook my waving umbrella for the group beacon."

"How did you get rid of them?" asked somebody.

"I didn't," said the man. "I pointed out to them that I was not their group leader and they told me - they were all American nuns, so we understood each other passably well - that they were well aware of that and that they had followed me on purpose because I looked more interesting than their own leader, who was a bulky and a bore, and they now wanted to stick with me."

"There I was in St Peter's, with 16 nuns looking to me for a good time. So I said: 'Follow me, ladies,' and into the great

church we went. If I know one thing about large Catholic churches, or museums, or anywhere, it is that the most interesting parts of the building always have signs like "Keep Out" or "Staff Only" barring your way. So I made straight for a door marked "Private" and went through it. Some papal official, a Swiss guard or something, made an attempt to stop me, but when you see someone followed by 16 nuns, you hesitate, because you think they must have clearance, and while he was hesitating we were through like a flash.

"I don't know if you have ever been behind the scenes at St Peter's," said the man, looking challengingly at me. I said nothing. He had outsmarted me here and he knew it. "But it's a cross between a well-appointed golf club and one of those London livery companies. Lots of changing rooms and wardrobes, and lots of relics in glass cases - bones and



MILES KINGSTON

skulls, mostly. I think they keep the relics there as going away presents for important Catholic visitors. The nuns were certainly very impressed, so I told them to take one each as a souvenir, and they needed no second invitation.

"Meanwhile, I had been looking round for some clue as to where to go next - we were all alone in these back quarters and there was no one to ask - and while they were sorting out their souvenirs, I chose at random a door at the far end of the hall. I opened it and ushered them all through, and then followed them out - and found myself with 16 nuns on the Pope's balcony overlooking the Square of St Peter! And the crowd all staring up at us and waving!"

There was a dramatic pause. It was broken by the ringing of the man's mobile phone. He took it out. He answered it. He looked concerned. He said he would come at once. He put it away.

"Sorry, gents," he said. "Must dash. Finish the story some other time." So saying, he left. Personally, I think he had made the whole thing up, just to ruin my story. Some people are like that. Can't bear competition. Anyway, as I was saying, I was in Rome, a week or two back and damn! Run out of space. Some other time, I hope.

France's crisis lies in its failure to adapt to the end of the Cold War and one Germany, says David Marsh

Traumatised by the new reality

Pity poor France! A Gallic conspiracy theorist, pondering the state of the nation, might ruefully imagine that France had been brought to its current low ebb by sleight of foreign hand. While nuclear test blasts echo fruitlessly around the South Pacific, at home the currency is languishing, economic growth declining, social divisiveness widening and confidence in political leadership crumbling. Could this be a product of a cunning plot to destabilise France by feeding it the illusion that the country could ignore the disagreeable realities of the post-Cold War world? By seeking to tie the franc to the mark in a bid to hold down a unified Germany - a policy now coming more unstuck by the day - has France been lured into a position of economic and political infirmity by its neighbour east of the Rhine?

The truth is more prosaic. France is in a mess because of its own failure to make internal reforms to adjust to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the ending of the US-Soviet superpower system. External circumstances have changed, but France still wants to play the game of "Carry On as a Grande Nation" - exerting pivotal international influence without the pivot. Promising a colourful mix of nationalism, Europeanism, socialism, corporatism and liberalism, President Jacques Chirac took office in April either unaware or uncaring of the contradictions in his policies. Six months and a string of broken promises later, the full extent of the crisis facing France's society and its decision-making structures has been laid bare. Chirac has been hoist with the petard of his own hubris.

France's economic malaise is just one element of its troubles. They include the spillover into France of terrorist attacks emanating from the bloody unrest in Algeria - a problem that both feeds and feeds off the growing alienation of the country's new-generation immigrants from the Maghreb. The economic crisis is, however, the most serious manifestation of France's ills, not least because it exposes the country's full vulnerability in the all-important bilateral comparison with Germany.

The sheer ponderous continuity of

France still wants to play the game of 'Carry on as a Grande Nation'

German political leadership has exacerbated France's task of maintaining economic credibility. Since 1983, when France shifted away from devaluations to keeping the franc steady against the mark, France has had eight prime ministers, none of them achieving the full confidence of the financial markets - while Germany has had Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

Over the past five years the power of French-style capitalism, epitomised by the omnipresence of *grande école* educated functionaries in industry, banking and the civil service, has been weakened, beyond measure. Since German unification in 1990, top French industrial companies and

banks have been much less successful than German ones in restructuring their operations to meet international competition.

The decaying influence of the French governmental elite has been evident, too, in budgetary policy. Well-meaning statements of intent have not been turned into action. Unlike Germany, which has recently been more adept than expected in cutting its budget deficit to match the European targets for economic and monetary union, France's fiscal stance has been irresolute. Its public sector indebtedness, like that of Germany, has doubled during the past five years. France, though, has nothing to show for it - in contrast to the Federal Republic, which has taken on the extra debt to absorb and rehabilitate the former East Germany.

Edouard Balladur, the Gaullist prime minister between 1993 and 1995 and Chirac's opponent in the presidential election earlier this year, launched a plausibly worded crusade two-and-a-half years ago to head off what he called the "fatal trap of spiralling indebtedness". Balladur's rhetoric far outstripped his capacity to deliver, and the deficit rose last year to 6 per cent of gross domestic product, double the Maastricht target.

Balladur's successor, Alain Juppé, warned three weeks ago that high public spending, particularly on social security, placed France in "national peril". Juppé has faced anger within his own party over his illegitimate use of a chic subsidised Paris apartment (which he is now being forced to vacate), a one-day general strike from public service workers protesting

about a planned pay freeze, and increased attacks on the *franc fort* from right- and left-wing politicians. The latest came last week from Juppé's Gaullist rival Philippe Séguin, who criticised the "devastating" consequences of high French interest rates.

High short-term interest rates no longer support the franc. They depress it because the triple effect of lowering economic growth, pushing up government spending on unemployment and further weakening the capital base of France's badly overstretched banking system makes the *franc fort* policy

Whatever action is taken on the economic front, the short-term results will be dire

increasingly unsustainable in the eyes of the currency markets. France will be able to avoid a formal devaluation against the mark thanks to the wider currency fluctuation bands that were brought in during the 1993 summer flare-up in the European exchange-rate mechanism. But the next few weeks are likely to show that France is willing to trade a weaker franc - and (inevitably) the postponement of its plans for European monetary union - in return for lower interest rates and hopes of economic recovery.

As *Le Monde* delicately put it in an editorial on Friday, Britain, by lowering sterling's value against the mark in

September 1992, provided an "example" that could "enrich" the French economic debate. Britain's devaluation, *Le Monde* pointed out, is one reason why the UK has 1 million fewer unemployed people than France. Unlike Britain in 1992, France has a low inflation rate and a current account surplus, but the overriding need to reduce interest rates indicates that the franc's link with the mark will shortly be "temporarily loosened" (as any Paris governmental euphemism would no doubt describe it).

Unfortunately for Mr Chirac and Mr Juppé, France's troubles cannot be resolved simply by Houdini-like unravelling of the mark knot. Reflecting shortages in skills, flexibility and capital in much of French industry, as well as the sluggishness of European export markets, France's immediate corporate prospects would receive only a modest boost from a franc depreciation. Further, a looser monetary policy would require France to tighten further budgetary rigour - a move already demanded by the Patronat employers' federation, which is likely to cause more pain all round.

France is in the uncomfortable position of knowing that, whatever action it takes on the economic front, the short-term consequences will be dire. This will be grist to the mill of Parisian conspiracy theorists. Anglo-Saxon foreign-exchange dealers taking an autumn break around the Champs-Élysées in the next few weeks should take out extra insurance cover.

The author is director of European strategy at Robert Fleming, the London-based investment bank.

BOOK REVIEW

The amateurs of Downing Street

TOO CLOSE TO CALL
Sarah Hogg and Jonathan Hill

Little, Brown, £17.50

mons pressure on No 10 staff."

John Major's personal back-up is "not generous". Diary pressures, cobbled-together speeches, exhausted meetings, missing clothes, snatched sandwiches... on it goes.

After a while the reader begins to wonder whether this is jolly and admirable or, rather, a remarkably bad way of trying

to govern a country. Major as a leader and Downing Street as a machine come across as essentially passive, driven by outside pressures and rarely in control. "Under the cumulative impact of general tiredness, things began to go wrong. The Prime Minister's schedule had become impossibly overloaded..." Things happen. Foreigners

happen, newspaper stories happen, polls happen, revolts happen, bad policies happen. Our heroes, fuelled by Big Macs, nursery-school jokes and native grit, battle through. But rarely do the authors convey much sense of purpose, of a driving central intelligence.

This is particularly odd since Hogg was, after all, head of the policy unit and the person in charge of long-term strategic thinking, while Hill was head of Major's political office. The gossip at the time was that the policy unit in the Hogg era was overwhelmed by daily crisis management and therefore unable to think properly. This book, written by the defence, makes that prosecution case compellingly.

The received wisdom is that things are working better under the new team of Norman Blackwell and Howell James -

two men who probably won't write a joint book referring to themselves in the third person, as these authors do. But this is about more than personalities; a tendency towards drift and short-termism seems built into the cramped, understaffed machinery at the heart of government. And John Major's experience shows how damaging it can be: administrative inadequacy and political failure are not unrelated.

So although this is a book which will be much quoted by historians of the Major years, it has nearer and sharper uses. I would be surprised if there weren't a few underlined and broken-backed copies lying around the office of the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, I'd be shocked if there weren't.

Andrew Marr

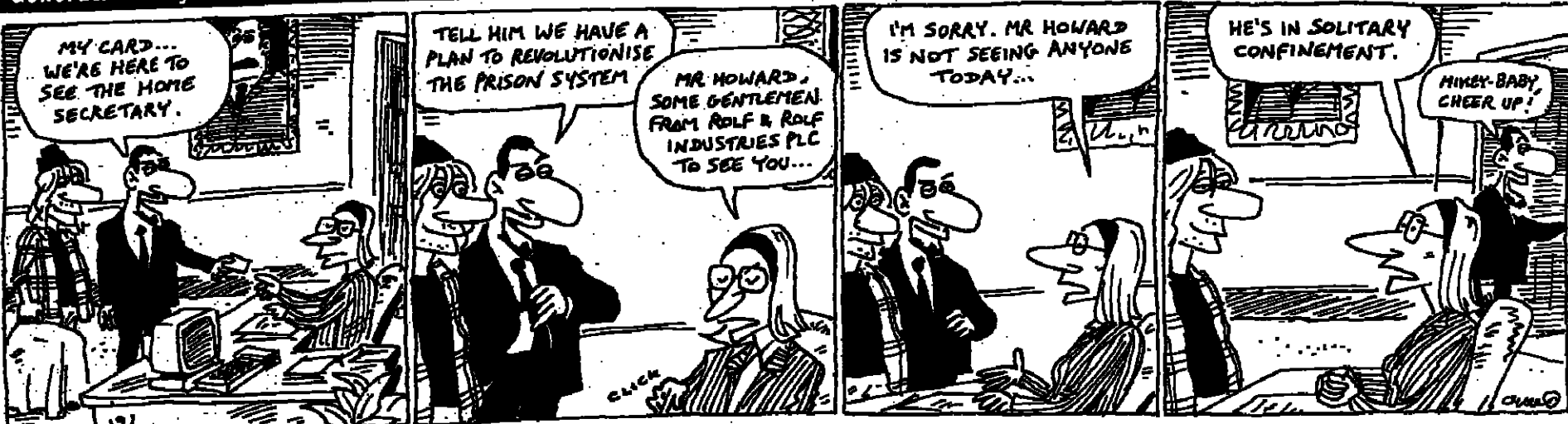
Unlike Margaret Thatcher, the current prime minister has been analysed little in office by academics or serious authors. Now two of John Major's closer unelected colleagues, who quit Downing Street recently, have given us a valuable inside glimpse of his administration.

Much of it could be called the higher trivia of politics: the decorations to the little jokes swapped by the Prime Minister's staff. Major himself comes across as one would expect from close-quarters supporters: a decent, chivvied man of huge stamina and considerable personal courage. When we get to the 1992 election and then the extraordinary events of this summer, the narrative is pacy enough to draw the reader in; at one point I caught myself unconsciously rooting for Major against -

well, commentators like me. But there is something odd here. This is a book which comes alive when there is a campaign on, against the Labour Party, or against sections of the Conservative Party, or against European federalists, but which is much flatter when the real business of government is being described.

Indeed, the earlier parts of the book are unintentionally devastating about Downing Street. The amateurishness, strain and overwork of the Prime Minister's office dominates. Much of the time this is presented as admirably British and jolly. Downing Street is a converted house, crammed with staff. "Compared with any Whitehall department, or the offices of heads of government anywhere else in the Western world, it is tiny. [This]... puts enormous

Generation Why



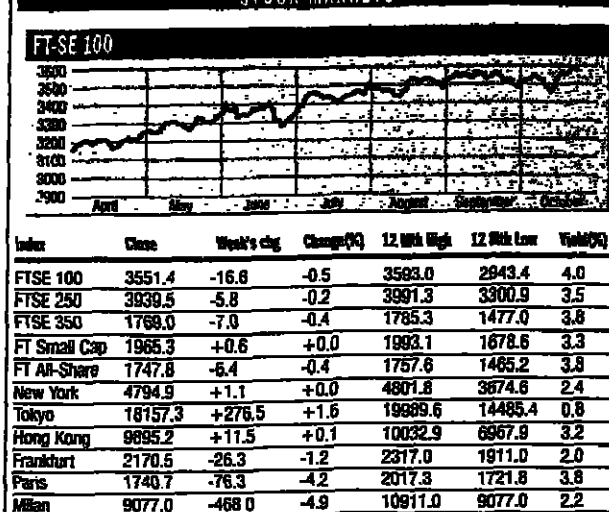
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MARKET SUMMARY

STOCK MARKETS

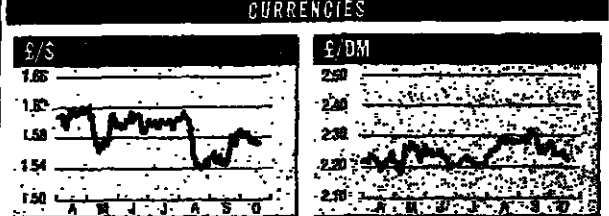
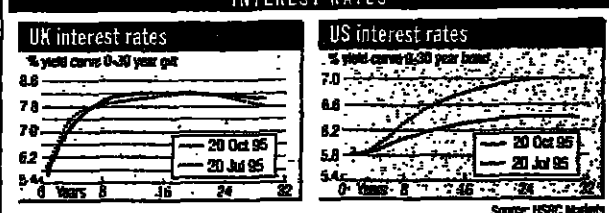


Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	12 Mth High	12 Mth Low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	3551.4	-16.8	-0.5	3593.0	2843.4	4.0
FTSE 250	3030.5	-5.8	-0.2	3091.3	2300.9	3.5
FTSE 350	1768.0	-7.0	-0.4	1785.3	1477.0	3.8
FT Small Cap	1985.3	+0.6	+0.0	1993.1	1678.6	3.3
FT All-Share	1747.8	-6.4	-0.4	1757.6	1465.2	3.8
New York	4794.9	+1.1	+0.0	4801.8	3674.6	2.4
Tokyo	18157.3	+276.5	+1.5	18689.6	14485.4	0.8
Hong Kong	9695.2	+11.5	+0.1	10032.9	6967.9	3.2
Frankfurt	2170.5	-26.3	-1.2	2217.0	1911.0	2.0
Paris	1740.7	-76.3	-4.2	2017.3	1721.8	3.8
Milan	9077.0	-468.0	-4.9	10611.0	9077.0	2.2

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Unit: FTSE 350 companies	Price (p)	Week's chg	Change (%)	Falls - Top 5	Price (p)	Week's chg	Change (%)
Sum All Group	391	29	8.0	Trakka House	22	5	18.5
Dorling Kindersley	538	38	7.0	Body Shop Int	126	14	9.5
M&G GP (Hldg)	1353	94	7.5	Asda Group	96.5	8.5	8.1
British Biotech	883	59	7.2	Bentall	157	12	7.1
Guardian	243	16	7.1	Pitt Morgan	186	14	7

INTEREST RATES



Pound vs.	Close	Week's chg	Tr. sp.	Dollar vs.	Close	Week's chg	Tr. sp.
\$ (London)	1.5765	+0.026	1.6200	£ (London)	0.6343	-0.17	0.6173
\$ (New York)	1.5735	-0.056	-	£ (New York)	0.6356	+0.02	-
DM (London)	2.2048	-4.52p	2.4325	DM (London)	1.3975	-3.18p	1.5015
Yen (London)	157.65	-1.76	157.66	Yen (London)	100.18	-0.54	97.32
£ Index	83.6	-0.9	89.0	\$ Index	92.4	-0.5	93.1

OTHER INDICATORS

Close	Week's chg	Year Ago	Index	Latest	Year Ago	Best Price
Oil Brent \$	15.88	-0.35	16.71	RPI	150.6	3.9pc 2.4
Gold \$	381.75	-2.25	390.90	GDP	-	2.9pc 4.1
Gold £	242.15	-2.08	241.20	Base Rates	-	6.75pc 5.25

Source: Datastream

IN BRIEF

Scholl board seeks peace deal

Board members of Scholl, the footwear group, met last night with a representative of the company's dissent shareholders in an effort to make peace ahead of tomorrow's extraordinary meeting. The dissent shareholders, who claim significant support, need a majority vote for a proposal that three Scholl board members step down, to be replaced by nominees who will work towards selling the company. Yesterday, Christopher Mills, a director of JO Hambro and Partners and one of the dissenters, said: "We are trying to reach a compromise... a long prolonged war is in nobody's interest."

Daiwa 'planned to continue cover-up'

A former managing director of Daiwa Bank said he and other bank executives planned to continue concealing a \$1.1bn loss at its New York branch until the mid-term book closing in September. Hiroyuki Yamaji, who resigned from the Osaka-based bank on 9 October also hinted in an interview in the *Asahi* newspaper yesterday that the Japanese authorities approved of the action. Mr Yamaji's reported remarks could further strain relations between US regulators and the Japanese. (*Bloomberg*)

British rely on short-term finance

Britain's small and medium-sized businesses rely more on short-term financing than their continental European counterparts, according to a survey from the venture capital group, 3i. A key finding of the survey is that 42 per cent of Britain's small and medium-sized company debt is in bank overdrafts, compared to 17 per cent of Germany's similar sized companies and an overall European average of 29 per cent. Only 19 per cent of the UK companies surveyed employed long-term debt of over five years, compared to 36 per cent of their German counterparts.

More price cuts at Asda

Asda, which last week announced price cuts on non-prescription medicines, yesterday said it was now slashing the price of bananas from 25p to 19p a pound - the lowest price for nearly 20 years. Asda sells 8 million bananas a week and says the price cut marks the first salvo in what it expects to be a price war in the fruit and vegetable market. "These price cuts will maintain our position as Britain's lowest priced national supermarket," said Barry Springay, produce trading director.

Manufacturing pay rises 3.5 per cent

Manufacturing pay awards averaged 3.5 per cent provisionally in the three months ending September, according to the latest CBI Pay Databank released today. This compares with 3.4 per cent for the three months ending June 1995 and 3 per cent for the three months ending September last year. In the service sector pay awards averaged 3.4 per cent provisionally in the three months ending September, down from 3.9 per cent a year ago.

World Trade Organisation shuns China

China has failed in its bid to join the World Trade Organisation. US trade representative Mickey Kantor said North America was one of several countries that has objections to China's entry. "I don't know of any major trading nation who is impressed by the Chinese offer so far," Mr Kantor said, speaking at a press briefing of the so-called quadilateral group - the US, Japan, Canada and the European Union - in Harrogate yesterday.

British managers 'lowest paid'

Employees in the UK lose a higher proportion of their pay to income tax and social security than many of their counterparts overseas, according to research from the accountancy firm Arthur Andersen. Typically, take-home pay for the British worker and manager is amongst the lowest out of those surveyed. US employees are the best off while the Germans have the highest direct tax burden.

Few takers for rail sell-off

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR

In a poor omen for the eventual sale of Railtrack next year, two important elements of the rail privatisation process have attracted far fewer firm bids than expected.

The Government intends to press ahead with the privatisation of Railtrack next spring, in spite of considerable opposition. Other parts of the railway network have already been put up for sale.

The sale of the three rolling stock companies, which now own all of BR's trains and locomotives, has attracted only two outside bidders in addition to the three management buy-out teams. And there have been so few bidders for the three heavy-haul freight companies the Government is encouraging joint bids for all three.

Among outsiders, only two - a consortium involving Nomura and US broking organisation Babcock & Brown, and the US company GE - have expressed interest in buying the rolling stock companies, which are estimated to be worth around £500m each.

Both groups have bid for all three companies. But it is thought that GE may be on the point of withdrawing its offer, which does not comply fully with the seller's requirements.

The formal bids were posted with Hambros, the Government's adviser on the sale, at the end of September. Sources close to the sale claimed that there was still a possibility of persuading GE to continue with its offer.

Industry sources said the formal interest in the rolling stock companies was disappointing given the wide spread of interest at the earlier bidding stage, with 41 companies seeking information on the sale.

The rolling stock companies were all given eight or 10-year leases to the train operators and the income stream is therefore predictable, with 80 per cent of it underwritten by the Government, which hopes to raise as much as £1.5bn from the sale.

The three freight companies, which were created out of BR's Trainload Freight, are all profitable and also attracted widespread interest initially. However, again, apart from the

management buy-out teams, only two outside companies, both from the US, have expressed an interest in buying them.

One, Wisconsin Central, is bidding for all three and has made it clear that it wants to re-unite them into one company. It feels the enforced fragmentation is uncompetitive given that railfreight only has a 7 per cent share of the market and faces stiff competition from road.

Transport ministers now appear to regret having split up the three and have advised the management buy-out teams to put in joint bids.

However, this worries railfreight users. Julia Clarke of the Railfreight Users Group said: "Having a monopoly would not benefit many railfreight users, particularly those, like steel and aggregates companies, which are quite heavy users of rail, for whom road is not a very viable alternative."

Meanwhile, the Transport Department is drawing up a new flexible scheme to franchise out the West Coast main line, which was dropped from the privatisation programme in the summer because of uncertainty over the £1bn cost of upgrading the line.

The Government is planning to offer bidders a choice both of the level of investment in the line and the type of new rolling stock. Bidders would not have to pay any of the capital investment, but those opting for a more sophisticated solution would pay higher track access charges to Railtrack, the owner of the lines. They would also pay more to the rolling stock leasing companies for the trains.

The options would range from state-of-the-art track and ultra-fast trains to a cheaper upgrading of the infrastructure for use by rolling stock little faster than British Rail's present high speed trains. Potential operators opting for the more expensive solutions would also be given a much longer franchise period than the present seven years.

Sir George Young, the transport minister, is pressing officials to have the options prepared as early as possible next year. However, it is unlikely that the West Coast line will be put out to franchise before the expected sale of Railtrack in April or May next year.



The train now standing at platform one belongs to... Only two outsiders have bid for the companies which now own all the rolling stock

Photograph: Chris Bott

Watchdog plans clampdown on health insurance schemes

NIC CICUTTI

The Personal Investment Authority, the financial watchdog, is to clamp down for the first time on health insurance and long-term care products, a market which is worth hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

It is considering regulating their sale in order to avoid a scandal like that which hit personal pensions.

PIA officials are planning to draw up a discussion document during the next few months to debate the merits of tough controls on the rapidly growing health and medical insurance sector.

Although no decision is expected for some months, senior PIA executives are confident that they will be drawing up rules for some or all of the sector by the end of next year.

One source said: "One should not underestimate some of the problems involved in arriving at a workable compromise in this area."

But it is virtually inevitable that there will have to be something in place in the very near future.

"This is a market which many people expect to boom. There would be an outcry if we were to see a repetition of the personal pension scandal in a few years' time."

The PIA's initiative comes at a time when the Government has been strongly signalling its own move away from providing totally for people who fall ill and the elderly in need of long-term care.

The market for such products has risen sharply. Last year, about 10,000 people took out long-term care policies for the first time, three times more than in the previous 12 months.

The cost of a single premium for someone aged 60 or over, at present the largest market for such policies, can be about £10,000.

The remaining health insurance market, including medical and critical illness cover, is already several times larger than this and is widely expected to grow in the next decade.

Critics have claimed that allowing the uncontrolled sale of such products may lead to a problem of massive mis-selling, with many elderly people discovering too late that they have received bad advice.

Earlier this year, the Association of British Insurers, the industry's trade body, published a detailed statement of best practice for members. However, an ABI spokesman said yesterday this should not be taken to mean that the insurers association supports regulation led by the PIA.

Most companies are now willing to see long-term care products being regulated by the PIA. They also argue that health and medical insurance should remain largely unregulated.

Peter Gatenby, appointed actuary at PPP Lifetime Care, said: "We are in favour of regulation by the PIA in areas of training and competence of salesforces and advisers. We also believe that proper financial fact-finds of clients should be carried out."

"Obviously, any rules would have to reflect the difference between the products we are marketing and other investment products," he added.

"I would not be in favour of regulating health and medical insurance."

Other senior executives, who refused to be named, conceded that unless they accept that all health and long-term care products will come under the watchdog's scrutiny they will eventually have controls foisted on them.

Mr Miller joined Lovell Construction in 1960 as a management trainee.

YJ Lovell reported a £4.1m profit last year and a half-year profit of nearly £900,000 but trading is believed to have worsened. Shares in YJ Lovell traded on Friday at 13p against a high for the year of 61p, valuing the 200-year-old group at little more than £5m. Last year, the shares touched 173p.

Mr Sellier said that he was pleased to have helped the group to its £70m-plus capital reconstruction but since that time the "markets have run against us." He dismissed suggestions that his early departure had been the result of a boardroom coup.

Early departure at Lovell

DAVID HELLIER

Robert Sellier, the chief executive of YJ Lovell, the struggling construction group, is to retire a year earlier than planned. Mr Sellier, 62, who arrived from George Wimpey in 1991, will leave the company next month. Mr Sellier attracted attention last year, when the company's annual accounts showed that his pay and pensions package cost the company £747,000, almost twice what it paid in dividends to its ordinary shareholders. £455,000 of the package was additional pension contributions and the tax on them.

A statement issued yesterday said Mr Sellier had originally planned to retire in August next year but, with the downsizing of the group - YJ Lovell recently decided to pull out of private housebuilding - the board agreed to Mr Sellier retiring earlier than planned.

Mr Sellier said his early departure was sensible given that the business had been slimmed in recent months and there was now a need to cut overheads. "I am a fairly substantial overhead," he admitted.

He said that his departure terms were confidential and still had to be ratified by the group. He added that there would be a payment for this year's pension but it would be less than last year's.

Meanwhile, the company said that David Heppell, currently president of the group's US division - and a former colleague of Mr Sellier's at Wimpey - will take over as chief executive instead of group director George Miller, who has decided "for personal reasons" not to take up the job as envisaged earlier this year.

Mr Sellier said Mr Miller, who would remain group director, desperately wanted the job but that his reasons for not now taking it were "very personal" and "very genuine."

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Pensions claim fight

DAVID HELLIER

Morgan Stanley, the US investment bank, said yesterday it would fight a \$100m (£60m) claim made by Mirror Group Newspapers Pension Trustees.

A spokeswoman for the US investment bank said last night that the claim - writs were served late last week in New York - was "without foundation."

"We will seek to ensure that it will be seen as such if it comes before the courts."

The pension fund trustees are claiming \$100m, plus interest and punitive damages, from Morgan Stanley Trust Company, which is part of the investment bank.

The pension fund trustees claim the bank held \$100m of investments on behalf of the fund immediately before the death of Robert Maxwell and that the assets are now lost.

The settlement, agreed with a number of institutions after 18 months of negotiation, brought in a total of £276m for the pension funds and avoided the need for lengthy legal action. It included significant payments by the administrators of the Maxwell Communications Corp and the administrators of the private Maxwell companies, which held more than £200m in disputed pension fund assets.

The Morgan Stanley writ is believed to be the last significant claim that will be made by the trustees. The pension fund is now understood to have recovered enough cash to meet its pension obligations.

Brussels row over £80m Jaguar aid

BY RUSSELL HOTTEN

A row is developing between the European Commission and the Department of Trade and Industry over delays in Brussels approving a government aid package to Jaguar.

Sources in Brussels say the DTT has been dragging its feet in replying to requests for information about the £80m subsidy to the company, and the Commission may not now be in a position to approve the aid until the end of the year.

A DTT official at the EU's competition office this week to help speed up approval, which Jaguar says is essential if it is to go ahead with a £400m assembly plant.

Ford, which owns the Midlands-based luxury carmaker, had said that unless it received the money it would build a new Jaguar model, the X200, in the United States.

One critic of the DTT's handling of the affair said this weekend that the department had not fully thought through the terms of the aid, and was now having difficulty answering the Commission's questions.

Awarding the money is proving embarrassing for the DTT, and appears to be opening the floodgates for similar requests. Last week the *Independent* revealed that Rover group was talking to the DTT about a £70m-£100m package towards a £300m investment in a new engine plant. But a DTT spokesman dismissed the criticism, saying the size of the package meant it would take time to clear Commission competition rules. "We are responding to their questions in a timely manner."

In July, when Ian Lang, president of the Board of Trade, announced Jaguar's investment in the blaze of publicity, the DTT said it expected speedy approval. The aid is divided into two tranches: £48m in regional selective assistance, and £32m in local authority and agency grants. It is thought a regional aid will be cleared but a question mark hangs over whether the £32m breaks Commission competition rules.

A Jaguar spokesman said this weekend that the company was still confident the Commission would eventually approve the aid.

CBI unveils benchmarking plan

PETER RODGERS
Business Editor

The Confederation of British Industry is to use its annual conference in two weeks' time to launch a national "benchmarking" service for companies in conjunction with IBM and the London Business School.

The service will use a computer database to compare companies' performance with the best in their industries.

Benchmarking has become one of the centrepieces of the Government's competitiveness drive, which is being overseen by Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Department of Trade and Industry is developing its own complementary service, targeted at smaller companies than the CBI scheme - those with fewer than 50 employees.

Tim Eggar, the industry minister, claims no other country will have what he describes as "user friendly" benchmarking systems on such a large scale. He describes them as "self-check mechanisms."

The theory is that by ranking themselves against competitors on a range of criteria, companies are provided with an essential first step to identifying what they need to do to improve their competitiveness.

IBM and the London Business School have done a detailed assessment of corporate best practice in more than 600 manufacturing companies in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. This database is being used to provide the performance benchmarks.

The services will be operated on personal computers through the CBI, Business

Links, government offices and trade associations. The service will take about two days to complete. It will begin with a questionnaire, followed by visits to the company from specialists who assess performance against the database, which has been effectively given to the employers' organisation.

Both the DTT and the CBI are to charge for their services, with the CBI fee expected to be about £1,000.

The Government's enthusiasm for benchmarking is based on studies that show that Britain has its fair share of world-class companies in size and quality of service but an unusually large number of laggards as well, which drag down national performance compared with the chief competitor countries. In the UK, companies have a comparatively good



record on customer service, but firms generally compare poorly on factors such as degree of automation, equipment layout in factories and employee involvement.

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INDEPENDENT
section two

What they should have told the Chancellor

GAVYN DAVIES

"If you come under too much pressure for tax cuts from your colleagues, tell them this: a financial crisis in the run-up to the election is just about the last thing the Government needs."

The following is what I hope the Treasury told the Chancellor as he pondered his Budget options over the weekend.

Chancellor, the state of the economy is even harder to read than usual. Our preliminary forecast for the GDP figures out today shows a rise of 0.4-0.5 per cent in the third quarter. A significant deviation either way from the expected growth when the figures are published will have an important effect on market expectations of interest rates.

So will Tuesday's CBI survey. Usually, this follows the pattern of the Chambers of Commerce and Purchasing Managers surveys. Both have painted a picture of a slowing economy, though not yet a contracting one. The most worrying feature has been a sharp rise in the balance of companies that believe their holdings of inventories are excessive. This could well foreshadow a quarter or two of declining stocks, which would severely dent the manufacturing sector.

Exports slowed earlier in the year, and all the surveys indicate that growth in foreign orders is still cooling off. Furthermore, business surveys in continental Europe indicate that our main export markets are slowing. But in the US growth has bounced back quite strongly from the doldrums seen earlier this year. Overall, we expect export growth to improve, but probably not before the turn of the year.

Domestic demand is puzzling. The retail sector was weak in the first quarter, recovered strongly in the second, but has stagnated in the third. Special factors, including

the weather, may have artificially depressed consumer spending in recent months. Investment, though, now seems to be growing quite strongly in the manufacturing sector, and surveys for capital spending in both services and manufacturing are encouraging.

The big question for policy is which way GDP growth will shift from its present rate, which is quite close to the 2.25 per cent per annum trend. Near term, it is quite likely to dip below this rate, because there is more inventory shedding to be done, both here and on the Continent.

This will be a rocky time politically. But the prospects for growth next year look good.

Real disposable income will grow by 2.5-3 per cent in 1996, and companies are readily able to finance additional capital spending. If a serious recession should develop next year, we would be at a loss to explain why monetary conditions are basically expansionary, and the private sector is not experiencing the balance-sheet strains that normally precede a recession. If there is a big shift away from trend GDP growth next year, it is more likely to be up than down.

A year ago, this prospect would have been quite alarming, since the economy was clearly exceeding the speed limits that lead to rising inflation. When interest rates were raised by 1.5 per cent about a year ago, many commentators said this was unnecessary. But subsequent inflation figures have proved them wrong. The underlying inflation rate is at a two-year high of 3.1 per cent, and will probably rise to 3.5 per cent in mid 1996, well above the 2.5 per cent target. Without last year's monetary tightening, it would almost certainly have moved above the 1-4 per cent range during 1996.

The great unknown is how much spare

capacity still exists in the economy. It is easy to conclude that output is still some 2-3 per cent below trend, but this depends on a mechanical extrapolation of the long-term trend. This is too simplistic. Many of the direct measures of the economy's capacity suggest that strains on the system are already running at about the same levels as they were in 1987, just before the take-off in inflation at the end of the last cycle.

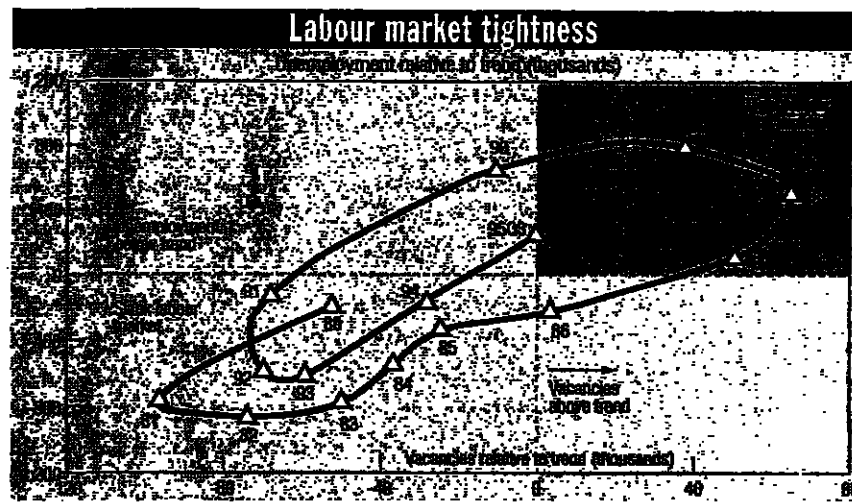
Less familiar is the fact that it is also now true of many important measures of slack in the labour market. As the graph shows, the combination of vacancies and unemployment relative to their trends is about to enter the danger territory seen in the 1987-89 period. Average earnings increases have admittedly been much more subdued than our equations have been predicting, but basic settlements themselves are now rising quite strongly.

Our conclusion is that the long-term trend in the economy may have temporarily been depressed by a lack of capital investment. Given the high rates of return on investment at present, there is every reason to believe the growth of the capital stock

can be restored to previous trends, but it may take some time. We therefore see the current slowdown in demand growth as good news - a vindication of the policy stance pursued in the past 18 months. Our main expectation is that it will not go much further. Pressures for a base rate cut will probably intensify as the inventory shake-out develops in the next few months, but we would try to minimise any easing in monetary policy during this temporary weakness. Cuts now could spell the need for increases in base rates just before the election.

Finally, the Budget. The public sector borrowing requirement will be around 3.5 per cent of GDP this year, still much too high. As you, Chancellor, have been saying in public, it is not yet clear that tax cuts can be "afforded". In the sense that the public borrowing problem has been solved. Only if tough control over public spending can be maintained and if the economy can grow faster than trend for a couple more years will the Budget get anywhere near your balance in the medium term. Minor tax cuts might be just about acceptable if we can get the spending cuts we want. But that will result in a freeze in real spending in the year before the election - something the Tory party may not be prepared for.

Furthermore, we have not succeeded in hitting our real spending targets in any recent year, so the markets are questioning our resolve. If you come under too much pressure for tax cuts from your colleagues, tell them this: a financial crisis in the run-up to the election is just about the last thing the Government needs. - HM Treasury



13 years after Laker Airways nose-dived into oblivion, its founder is still bitter and plotting reincarnation on a Europe-Florida run

'Fly me' folk hero set to take to skies again

THE MONDAY INTERVIEW

SIR FREDDIE LAKER

Sir Freddie Laker's personal Assistant had told me to look out for a Rolls Royce, though she was not sure which of the two he keeps in Florida he would be driving. "It will be either blue or white," she said. But when he turned up outside my hotel at the agreed time he was in neither. Instead, he was behind the wheel of a low-slung gold Nissan sports car of uncertain vintage.

He pushed open the passenger door and greeted me with that old fly-me grin. Before long, we were heading south from Fort Lauderdale towards Miami on an interstate that Sir Freddie hopes will soon be buzzing with British tourists - on fly-drive packages to Florida courtesy of himself. For the former pioneer of cheap trans-Atlantic travel and folk-hero entrepreneur is about to take a flying leap over the pond once again.

On 28 March next year, all being well, Sir Freddie will take off triumphantly from Gatwick Airport, his old base, aboard a newly refurbished DC10 air-

"There was no way I could put Humpty Dumpty together again"

liner, his still-famous name printed in eight-foot letters down each side. The plane will be one of three of the wide-bodied jets with which he intends to launch a reincarnated Laker Airways, skidding package tourists from Britain, Germany and possibly also Italy to southern Florida.

Throughout our day together - in his doctor's surgery, in an aircraft maintenance hangar and in his offices on the edge of Fort Lauderdale airport - we nattered about his prospective comeback. Aged 73 and recently recovered from a scrape with prostate cancer, he still has the fizz and enthusiasm of someone much younger. And only occasionally did he allow the conversation to turn back to darker times and to his former

nemesis, Lord King. It has been 13 years since the original Laker Airways, which in the late Seventies and early Eighties introduced thousands of Britons to cheap trans-Atlantic flying with the Skytrain service, came unglued. After a period of rapid and buccaneering expansion into the fifth largest carrier between Britain and North America, Skytrain collapsed in 1982.

"It should never have happened. The airline should never have stopped running," says Sir Freddie, who today still complains that he was illegally driven out of business by other airlines colluding to slash prices. His liquidator launched a lawsuit in the United States against British Airways and eight other carriers. In 1985, they finally settled out of court and gave Sir Freddie a peace offering of \$8m (£5m).

Sir Freddie claims he does not harbour any bitterness over the affair. "The trouble about being bitter is that you don't come to the right decisions," he says. But on this he is not terribly convincing. He says, almost in the same breath, that it was a "giant conspiracy". "I was screwed out of my mind. They thought it was fair to break the law. They broke the law. And the Government was in it up to the eyeballs."

Lord King, he implies, got his just deserts when he was ousted after BA was found guilty of dirty tricks against Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic. "Why do you think he had to leave? He left in disgrace."

So after the vindication of the settlement why didn't he revive the old Laker? "Because I was virtually shut out in everything I wanted to do. By the time we got to 1985, there was no way I could put Humpty Dumpty together again. It was obvious that the Government didn't want me in the aviation business in England and I had been aviation since I was 16."

By then he had already es-

tablished new homes in Miami and in the Bahamas, where he acted as a consultant to the Princess resort hotels - owned then and now by his long-time friend, Tiny Rowland.

Soon, he was testing his wings again, flying guests from the American mainland to the hotels, at first by leasing aircraft from other carriers. In 1992, however, he and a group of partners, including Oscar Wyatt, the multi-millionaire founder of the giant oil and gas conglomerate, Coast Corporation, founded Laker Airways (Bahamas) Ltd to do the job themselves. The mini-carrier, he says, has no debt and "makes a profit every day".

It was one of that operation's two Boeing 727 airliners that took us to the maintenance hangar on the edge of Miami's International Airport. The 19-year-old plane was undergoing a mandatory strip-down and not looking its best.

After checking first that the supervisor was watching the time sheets - Sir Freddie is evidently scrupulous about what he spends - he toured the machine. He was enraged to find the interior a shambles, with seat rows in piles and dirty escape doors lying on new carpeting. "They have no soul," he said later, vowing to use a different company next time.

From there we went to the Laker offices at Fort Lauderdale airport, where all activity is directed at the new trans-Atlantic venture. Waiting in Sir Freddie's suite, festooned with old Skytrain memorabilia, were artist's drawings of how the new DC10s might look.

The black-and-red livery is the same as on the original Laker planes, minus the star-spangled Skytrain insignia. He ordered that the lettering of Laker be made a bit taller, concluding that the version with the initials 'LA' intertwined on the tail looked ugly and should be ditched. The old Laker bird will go there instead.



Sky's the limit? Sir Freddie hopes with more than 250 million potential customers the new Laker will swiftly grow

Photograph: David Usborne

The new airline will be a partnership between his oldman friend, Mr Wyatt, and himself. They will hold 51 per cent and 49 per cent of the company respectively, but to comply with US foreign-ownership rules, Sir Freddie will only have 25 per cent of the voting rights.

Both are putting up the capital personally, without recourse to loans. But when asked what the sums actually were, Sir Freddie was suddenly coy. The three aircraft, meanwhile, have been leased on an eight-year contract from General Electric's leasing arm and are currently being refurbished in North Carolina.

The DC10s are the same aircraft used for Skytrain - Laker was the first airline outside the US to buy them - but that is where the similarity with the old

dead-cheap but bring-your-own-food service will end. Sir Freddie hopes that his new carrier will eventually have full scheduled routes, but in the meantime he expects package operators in Britain and Europe to fill his planes.

In Britain, TransAtlantic Vacations has already begun printed brochures featuring Laker flights. And the sales pitch is not rock-bottom fares, but "superior cabin service". Every seat, for example, will have individual state-of-the-art video units, a first for a charter carrier.

"It is a saying in racing that you must come in first. It's no good being second. I was first with Skytrain, but this time I'm not even second. I'm last," Sir Freddie said. "But I believe that in being last I can also become first again. I can take advantage

of all the new technologies that those already out there have not had access to. We're busy thinking up ideas for enhanced service."

The planes will be based at Gatwick, Manchester and Fort Lauderdale. In a nice irony, Sir Freddie expects to offer the maintenance contract for his fleet to BA. "It's a different airline from what is under Lord King," he chuckles. "And you don't have to sleep with them."

Sir Freddie's optimism is based on the premise that travel from Europe, including eastern Europe, to southern Florida is set to boom. He and Mr Wyatt, widely seen as an astute investor, calculate that from next year, package operators would have been facing a shortage of seats, particularly on wide-bodied,

multi-engined aircraft capable of making the journey non-stop.

Isn't Sir Freddie risking being shot down all over again? He thinks not. It might help that one of those he will be competing with on the Florida run will be Mr Branson himself, a close friend and the one man in British aviation for whom Sir Freddie expresses unalloyed admiration.

But he does not imagine that other airlines, including BA, could feel threatened by a small-fry, three-plane operation like his will be. But just in case they are, he warns: "They wouldn't get past the doorstep before being sued."

The new Laker Airways may not be small for ever. Sir Freddie admits to a fond hope that his 17-year-old son, also Fred-

die, might one day take it over. And he points to the potential for expansion.

"It's an American airline that won't be limited in scope in the way that British carriers are. I've got 250 million Americans as my [potential] customers. And we've got a place called Honolulu in Hawaii and Canada and South America."

Sir Freddie is getting a bit ahead of himself here. In my mind, I flash back to an American television commercial featuring the man himself on board one of his planes, which was filmed just before the demise of Skytrain.

With that same, unabashed Laker grin, he turns to the camera and asks: "Are you ready... for Sir Freddie?" Are we? Again?

David Usborne

Brewers face new 'widget' real ale challenge

Giant breweries may be merging in response to rising competition, falling beer consumption, and the steady flow of cheap cross-Channel imports. But minor breweries are opening every week, with a record 57 new brewers starting up last year alone. This brings the total number of producers of real ale to 347, according to the industry's guardian angel, Camra.

New entries to this year's *Good Beer Guide* have set up shop in buildings as varied as a disused woollen mill, an historic dockyard, an old forge, a garage, a converted granary, and a former county court building.

While the beers may vary in quality, their names are almost universally awful, including Double Whammy, Bog Standard Bitter and Piddle in the Snow.

The companies themselves rejoice in equally idiosyncratic names such as Leaking Boot, Leatherbritches - which also

keeps pigs and makes beer sausages - and Frog Island, which happens to operate in the shadow of the Carlsberg lager brewery in Northampton.

Some of these will undoubtedly fail, some will operate for fun as much as profit, but the chances are that maybe a dozen will follow the example of Bruce's Brewery and its "Fill-in-the-blank and Firkin" pubs. Founded in 1979 near the start of the real ale revival, the chain now numbers 60 pubs - with 21 in-house breweries - and is part of Carlsberg-Jetley.

The big brewers revived real ales alongside their standard ales and lagers, and now treat them as premium beers. A few years ago peace almost broke out between the big brewers and Camra.

But the editor of the *Good Beer Guide*, Jeff Evans, has declared war on the big brewers again for a development that he says amounts to reintroducing keg beers under false colours.



The real thing... but not all brands are, says Camra

They are using the "widget" technology, first developed to preserve draught beer in a can, to simulate real ales and serve them from a keg, using a swan-necked dispenser to aerate the beer and topping the display

with a dummy hand-pump. These nitro-keg beers, as Camra calls them, are cheaper to brew and three to four times more profitable than genuine real ale, which needs greater care and keeps less well.

Real ale has made a big comeback since the dark days in the 60s, when mass-produced keg beers like Watneys Red Barrel were driving cask conditioned beers out of existence.

The worst offenders in Camra's eyes are Yorkshire-based breweries like John Smith and Tetley, which offer parallel versions of their best beers. Camra suspects that Courage is about to follow suit.

Caffrey's Irish Ale, brewed in Northern Ireland by Bass, is typical of nitro-keg beers, and makes no claim to be anything else, says Camra. But customers pay an extra 10p a pint for it on average, which must be working wonders for Bass profits.

However, Camra and the big brewers are united in their appeal to the Chancellor to stem the tide of cheap beer that is crossing the channel.

The average UK pint of bitter costs £1.43, of which the Chancellor gets 46p, compris-

ing 25p of excise duty and 21p of VAT. Brewing and delivering the beer cost 27p, while running costs of the pub add a further 32p, leaving a gross profit of 38p, says the guide - of which the shareholders get an average 6p. By contrast, the duty in France works out at around 4p a pint.

As a percentage of total costs, tax has actually fallen, especially from the high point caused by the imposition of VAT. But the average UK pint could still be 30p cheaper if cross-Channel taxes were harmonised.

The *Good Beer Guide* lists 5,000 real ale pubs and 53 Beers of the Year, divided into eight categories and covering the country from the Orkneys to the South Coast. The winners include three medium-sized regional breweries - Fullers of London, Eldridge Pope from Dorset, both quoted companies, and the Lincolnshire-based Bateman.

Clifford German

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR MORTGAGE CUSTOMERS

Interest Rate Change

The rates of interest for existing mortgage customers (in appropriate cases the basic rate) will decrease by 0.45% with effect from 31st October 1995.

Fixed rate mortgages are not affected during the contractual fixed rate period.

In cases where mortgage interest rate changes are subject to notice, the decrease will take place after the appropriate notice period which will commence on 31st October 1995.

There will be no change to the interest rates on existing Secured Personal Loans regulated by the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

For customers participating in the Society's annual review procedure, this interest rate decrease will be taken into account when calculating new monthly payments from March 1996 or, in appropriate cases, the anniversary of the mortgage.



Chief Office: Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 0WZ. Telephone: Peterborough 01773 219171. Member of The Building Societies Association, Member of LMR. Assets exceed £1.5 billion.

TODAY

Companies
Finals: Edinburgh Dragon Trust, Fleming Inc & Capital, Kleinwort Second, MY Holdings, Royal Bank of Canada, Interim Davenport Knitwear, Delyn Group, Dunlop Investment Trust, Dunlop House, Fairbairn, Kleinwort Endowment, Ross Group, Shiloh.
Annual meetings: Gartmore Scotland Trust, GT Japan Inv Trust, Murrays Investment Trust, NM Smaller Australian.

EGMs: Aran Energy, GT Chile Growth, Millgate, Trio Hids Economics.
 The slowdown in the economy is likely to mean a smaller increase in GDP in the third quarter. Today's preliminary figure - the most important in a quiet week for statistics - is expected to signal a 0.5 per cent increase in the quarter. This will take the year on year growth rate to 2.3 per cent - down from 2.8 per cent in the second quarter and 3.7 per cent in the first. This would be the lowest growth rate since mid-1993. Economists think both manufacturing and services have slowed.

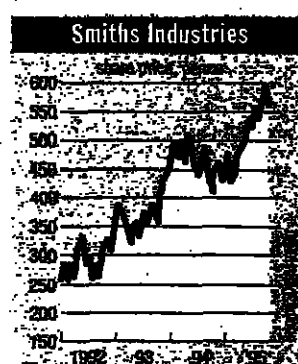
TOMORROW

Companies
 Expect shares in Wolseley, the builders merchant, to jump if full year pre-tax profits are in excess of £255m. The consensus is for £245m, an increase of 21 per cent over 1994. However, the company is likely to be cautious on the prospects of its key markets, with uncertainty affecting the UK and a slowing down for Ferguson in the US. McKee's, the plastics and consumer goods group, has also suffered from a depressed UK consumer market. However, brokers are looking for a substantial increase in 1995 pre-tax profits, with NatWest Markets expecting £46.5m against £32.2m last time. The 10 per cent increase in the interim dividend suggests confidence about the second half. But McKee's markets are unlikely to have improved and the outlook is still difficult in many areas.
Finals: Scottish Metro, Abtrust High Income Trust, London & St Lawrence.
Interims: Boxmore International, Edinburgh Investment Trust, HF Joel, London Securities, Ocean Wilson Holdings, Randfontein Estates, Silk Industries, Venturi Investment Trust, Yorklyde, Oceans Wilsons.

THE WEEK AHEAD

WEDNESDAY

Companies
Smiths Industries, the aerospace and defence engineer, is expected to report strong full-year results, with NatWest Markets predicting a 17 per cent increase on last year's pre-tax profits of £117.2m. While profits from acquisitions will play a less significant role in the second half, the company looks well-placed to reap the benefits of a recovery in aerospace demand. Two slight worries are the flat performance of

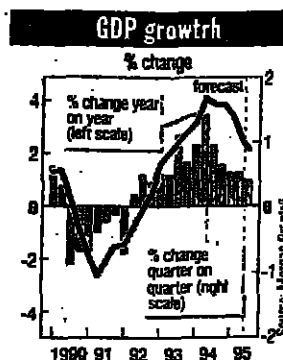


THURSDAY

Companies
Finals: Eurovein, Schroder Income Growth, Scottish Oriental Smaller, Majedie, Pressac Holdings, Schroder Income Growth, Morgan Grenfell Equity, Overseas Investment Trust.
Interims: British & American Film, ICI, Kleinwort Emerging, NEC Corp, Toshiba Corp, Westbury.
Annual meetings: Dowling &

FRIDAY

Companies
Finals: Murray Enterprise, Interims: Exagum International, Midland & Scottish Regeneration, Seaford.
Annual meetings: Albermarle & Bond Holdings, Barnato Exploration, Cornwell Parker, Great Universal Stores, Quality Software Products, Randfontein Estates, Regent Corp, Rubicon Group, Young Group.
EGMs: Fleming Japanese Trust, Menzies-Swain, Quality Software Products, Regent Corp.
Economics
 September statistics on mortgage lending by British banks. Digest of Agricultural Census statistics for UK - 1994.



BANKS, MERCHANT

Company	Price	Change
Barclays Bank	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Scotland	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Ireland	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Montreal	10.50	+0.10
Bank of New York	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Paris	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Spain	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Tokyo	10.50	+0.10
Bank of West	10.50	+0.10
Bank of America	10.50	+0.10
Bank of China	10.50	+0.10
Bank of India	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Japan	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Korea	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Russia	10.50	+0.10
Bank of South Africa	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Sweden	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Switzerland	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Taiwan	10.50	+0.10
Bank of Thailand	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the Netherlands	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the Philippines	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the Republic of China	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the United Kingdom	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the United States	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the Virgin Islands	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the West Indies	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank Group	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank Group Inc	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank Group Ltd	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank Group Plc	10.50	+0.10
Bank of the World Bank Group Pty Ltd	10.50	+0.10
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RACING: A trainer who has built up his stable the hard way takes on the Americans with a remarkable filly

Rose ready to turn on the heat

GREG WOOD

Shortly after tea-time on Saturday we will be able to pass judgement on the 1995 Breeders' Cup meeting, and if recent history is any guide, there are but two possible verdicts. It will be racing's Olympic, a true and valuable test to find the world's best horses. Or it will be an unrepresentative, drug-fuelled circus which does nothing to benefit the sport in Britain.

Ladbrokes make the second option an odds-on chance, with their offer of 10-11 that the British-based runners will return

from Belmont Park empty-handed. In theory, there is no reason why a racing follower's allegiance should extend any further than the latest horse to carry their money, but when the Breeders' Cup comes around, we get just as tribal as football fans.

Never mind that the logic which makes some of them "ours" is of a sort which Jack Charlton might recognise, or that in view of Britain's past

record - three winners, countless disappointments - a dispassionate approach might be easier on both the wallet and the spirit.

Everyone knows that beating North American horses on their own turf - not to mention their own dirt - requires a final, exceptional effort from animals which have already spent many months racing against the best. Yet still we back them, just in case. But when the team contains horses like Hever Golf Rose, who can resist? Hard at work since April, the winner of eight races in five countries, she has secured the growing reputation of Joe Naughton, her trainer, and offered a reminder that there is more to Epsom than just a racecourse.

Lake Coniston, who will join her in the field for the Breeders' Cup Sprint, is another local resident, at Geoff Lewis's yard, and as Naughton said: "it will be good if people start to realise that there is life beyond Newmarket and Lambourn. Big business people in London have got a great training centre right on their doorstep and it's nice that they are waking up to this."

Certainly, they are waking up to Naughton, thanks principally to Hever Golf Rose, who provided his first Group One success in the Prix de l'Abbaye



Hever Golf Rose carries her stable lad Matt Jerry around a tight bend on Lingfield's sand track on Saturday

Photograph: Robert Hallam

earlier this month. "She's definitely been a big help," Naughton said. "I had about 40 horses at the start of this year, but next season I'll be up to 60 or 65."

Hever Golf Rose will leave for New York today, but the travelling, at least, is something which Naughton does not need to worry about.

On Saturday morning the filly had gentle spin around a bend on Lingfield's all-weather track, starting about a furlong from the winning post and travelled around the turn into the back straight. This was another side to her preparation,

but the effects of her long campaign are harder to quantify. "She's giving all the right indications, she's nice and bubbly," Naughton said. "She really thrives on racing and she travels brilliantly, she settles in to a new environment straight away. But it's the end of a long year, and I think she'll either be very good or simply say she's had enough."

Naughton has held a licence for just five years, having spent the previous seven working for Barry Hills at a time when Peter Chapple-Hyam was also an assistant trainer.

Chapple-Hyam then started at the top as the master of Manton, but Naughton's progress has not been so smooth. "When I started I only had six horses and a run-down yard and I take a lot of personal satisfaction in what I've achieved. Obviously Peter's done brilliantly, but I'm getting there, even if it's taken me a little more time."

Chapple-Hyam has already been to Epsom and returned home with a Derby winner, but now it may be Naughton's turn. Young, easy-going and with more than a hint of south Lon-

don in his accent, he has all the makings of a people's champion. A final 60 seconds of effort by Hever Golf Rose on Saturday could take him into the big time.

Unlike Lake Coniston, Hever Golf Rose will not run with the assistance of either Lasix or Bute, the permitted performance-enhancing drugs. "It's not a moralistic thing, I just don't see the need," Naughton said. "She's always gives me everything anyway. Perhaps, for once, Ladbrokes have got it wrong. If they have, we'll make them pay."

Bank awaits going check

Only firm ground may stop Barton Bank and an attempt to relaunch his career in the Charlie Hall Chase at Wetherby on Saturday.

David Nicholson, his trainer, reports that the nine-year-old, well beaten at Aintree on his last start, "seems Al again". Another top chaser, Coulton, made a winning return at Wincanton yesterday, beating Amtrak Express, by six lengths.

LEICESTER

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GOING: Firm (Good to Firm in places). DRAW ADVANTAGE: None.

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sport

FOOTBALL: Cantona and company provide compelling entertainment as the colourful Frenchman returns to the capital

Pride and joy too late for Europe

Because of a low roof, the view from the back of the Stamford Bridge press box is like watching a wide-screen format movie — replace the whiff of burgers with popcorn and you could be at an open-air Odeon.

Given Saturday's occasion, Eric Cantona's return to London, it seemed a suitable perspective. Cantona was facing his first real test of composure since his Bruce Lee impression at the Palais and there was a crackling sense of anticipation in the air. Would the drama be repeated?

In the event, Manchester's occasionally wild bunch did treat us to a massacre, but the only resemblance to the recently revived Sam Peckinpah flick of that name was the constant sighting of blood-red shirts. Alex Ferguson's direction is more Ridley Scott than Peckinpah, all sharp movement and angles, with the pace fast-forward rather than slow-mo.

It was all too much for Chelsea. They conceded two goals in the first nine minutes and eventually shipped four. They did manage one of their own, but even that was scored by a United legend, Mark Hughes.

Hughes had an excellent game. He looked a threat whenever Chelsea managed to service him near goal (which was not very often) and was frequently involved in midfield. But for all his strength, courage and ability to bring others into play, Hughes would struggle to get in the United team — as he recognised in leaving it in the summer.

This side is built on pace and touch, mobility and vision. Andy Cole led the line with an awareness few suspected he had when classed as a pure goalscorer at Newcastle. Behind him Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Eric Cantona interchanged at will, pulling great holes in Chelsea's defensive cover. Further back sat the ballast, Nicky Butt and Roy Keane. With David Beckham and Lee Sharpe on the



GLENN MOORE
COMMENTARY

bench, United were at full strength for the first time this season.

If it was a frightening sight for Chelsea, it was a heartening one for the British game after a grim week in Europe. Of all the European results this season, United's exit to Rotor Volgograd, in the previous round, was the most depressing. While Liverpool and Nottingham Forest play variations of the Continental game, Ferguson is attempting to create a marriage between the British pace and power and European passing and patience.

United, by all accounts, were all over Volgograd but gave away two silly goals. A shame, they may have given us reason to be proud, especially as Saturday's starting XI passes UEFA's five-foreigners' regulation.

The match demonstrated both the virtues and vices of the Premiership. It was compelling entertainment, tackles flew, chances came and went like Graeme Souness signings, and a clutch of breathtaking goals were scored. The action was matched by the spectators' passion. This is why foreign players come to play in the English league and overseas television companies queue up to broadcast it.

But there were also balls bouncing off chests, getting caught under feet and running away from alleged traps all over the Bridge. It was not just the clodhoppers in defence, Cole's first touch is astonishingly

poor for a £7m striker while good players like Gavin Hastings and Dennis Wise were among those also embarrassed.

Two players stood out. No prizes for guessing their identity — Cantona and Ruud Gullit. When Gullit is involved Chelsea's play goes from monochrome to colour. Only Hughes and, sometimes, Wise, are on his wavelength and it was another of those days when he must have wondered what he was doing here. The support play was so lazy it seemed his presence gives others an excuse for evading responsibility.

He played everywhere, always with positive intent. His best spell was in midfield where he underlined that he is no dilettante, seeing out the autumn of his career for a final pay-day. His sublime passing is always evident, he now revealed an impressive work-rate. Combined with his anticipation and ability to risk a tackle (at one stage he held off Butt and Cole), it briefly swung the game.

By then (early second half) Cantona was firing. He was peripheral throughout but whenever he was involved United had a sharper edge. He featured in three of their four goals and provided the pass when Scholes hit the bar a minute after the break.

Scholes was widely seen as the player to make way for Cantona. He has responded by scoring so heavily he cannot be omitted. On Saturday his finishing was in the Robbie Fowler class. After three minutes Cantona distracted Chelsea as Gary Neville's deep cross came in and Scholes volleyed in from 15 yards. Six minutes later he thumped home after a sweeping move had sent him clear.

That whole move was a peach. United patiently strung 21 passes together, drawing Chelsea on to them, before Nicky Butt passed waist-high to Cantona. He killed the ball dead with stunning technique, spotted Scholes being played



Master class: Eric Cantona imparts words of wisdom to Paul Scholes at Stamford Bridge

Photograph: Howard Boylen

aside by Frank Sinclair, and slipped the perfect pass. It was a team goal, even Cole, not involved, had played his part. His presence, his pace, had induced Sinclair to give himself a yard and thus sit deep and betray the offside trap.

United eased up and Gullit dragged Chelsea back into the game. Their 75th-minute goal was a long time coming, partly because the final ball had too often been casual. This time Sinclair played a careful pass in to John Spencer, his chip was headed down by Paul Furlong for Hughes to volley in.

Chelsea were roused but, four minutes later, Giggs doused Sparky's spark. Having run at Steve Clarke from the half-way line he skipped past him in the box to score. Then Denis Irwin found Keane on the left and the ball was switched across the Chelsea backs, from him to Cantona, Cole and Mc-

Clair with a swiftness and accuracy rugby league's finest handlers would be proud of.

Cantona almost brought up a half-century of United goals, in his 100th appearance, but he let Neville's fine pass run away from him in the final minute. It would have been terribly unfair on Chelsea, who also lost Sinclair, dismissed for an ugly lunge on McClair a minute earlier.

It was also consoling to see

that even the finest technicians are prone to error in the Premiership's hurry-burry. The difference is, we are surprised when it happens to them.

Goals: Scholes (3) 0-1; Scholes (3) 0-2; Hughes (75) 1-2; Giggs (78) 1-3; Keane (85) 1-4.
Chelsea (2-3-2-2): Stuart Pearce, Gullit, Sinclair, Clarke, Wise (Burley, 4-3), Newton, Peacock (Spencer, 63), Myers, Furlong, Hughes. Substitutes not used: Richardson (4).
Manchester United (4-3-2-1): Schmeichel, G. Neville, Bruce, P. Foster, Irwin, Butt, Keane, Giggs, Scholes (McClair, 75), Cantona, Cole. Substitutes not used: Sharpe, Beckham. Referee: A. Wylie (Chester-le-Street).

Hignett positive about his position

JON CULLEY
Middlesbrough
Queen's Park Rangers

Given that one of them will shortly learn that it is he who is to be sacrificed at the altar of the club, this was not a good time for any Middlesbrough players to under-perform. Just as well, then, that they all did so together.

Or, rather, most of them. Delete from the list Steve Vickery, superb at the heart of a currently impenetrable defence, and Neil Cox, who looks to have a good idea of how a wing-back needs to function. Otherwise, from the rest, it was a not-quite-there sort of day.

So who will be the unlucky one? Naturally, no one within the club is giving a clue, but the sages without point to Craig Hignett, which seems a bit unfair, really, in the light of the way Hignett has complemented Nick Barnsley's successful introduction to the side. There is his goals tally, too, which Saturday's penalty raised to five for the season.

Hignett is aware of the talk but prefers to regard the new boy's coming in positive terms. Indeed, so keen is he to see Juninho flourish, regardless of the consequences for his own future, that he made an appeal for his protection on the field, fearing that bemused opponents will find frustration getting the better of them.

"He's built like a whippet and he will be just too quick for some defenders," Hignett said. "I just hope that referees will appreciate him and protect him. As for my own position, I know what people are saying and obviously there is a question mark over me. But I don't see myself as the odd man out and I'll do as much as I can to make it impossible for the manager to leave me out."

If his work permit comes through, Juninho may cause the are to fall at Old Trafford next Saturday, which would leave Wednesday's Coca-Cola Cup tie at Crystal Palace as the last opportunity for an anxious man to cement his place.

Saturday's result maintained Middlesbrough's extraordinary start. It is their fifth straight win and fifth consecutive game, in all competitions, in which they have not conceded a goal; but, statistics apart, there was not much to enthuse about. Unforced errors abounded and Rangers, for whom Trevor Sinclair was again hugely impressive, ought to have taken a point.

Behind from the 14th minute, the Londoners survived a second penalty after, allowed Jan Agre Njoroft to take — and miss — and thereafter took charge. An equaliser seemed certain in the 60th minute when Sinclair's chip came back off the bar to Daniele Dichiò but the young striker, faced with an open goal, headed over the top, after which there was no cheering Ray Wilkins, the manager, with kind words. "People keep saying we are playing well," he said, "but we are losing points."

Goal: Hignett (pen 0-1).
Middlesbrough (2-2-2-1): Walsh, Cox, Pearson, Vickery, Whelan (Hendrie, 81), Barnsley, Forster. Substitutes not used: Hignett.
Queen's Park Rangers (2-3-2-2): Barclay, Vela, Peaty, Macdonald, Brown (Ellan, 77), Holliday, Innes, Sinclair, Hobs. Substitutes not used: Wilkins, Chalmers. Referee: M. Reed (West Midlands).

Rioch's wind of change proves only a gentle breeze

PHIL SHAW

Arsenal 2
Aston Villa 0

In his temporary incarnation as a radio pundit, George Graham has so far visited Highbury less often than a rabid Tottenham fan. Which is a shame, for it would be fascinating to hear his opinion of the "new" Arsenal, who bear more than a passing resemblance to the version Graham built and lost.

The wind of change which supposedly blew through the

marble halls during the summer was, on the evidence of their victory over Villa, no more than a warm breeze. If Arsenal hoped to reinvent themselves as a charismatic force by head-hunting Bruce Rioch and letting him spend £12m on Dennis Bergkamp and David Platt, they have not succeeded.

Least that outrages the true believers, it should be added that at their peak of five years ago, Graham's Gunners no more fitted the "boring" stereotype than Rioch's team are the cavaliers some are keen to proclaim them. On Saturday, the

similarities were more apparent than the differences, unsurprising given that only one of the home 14, Bergkamp, was signed by the new manager.

The keeper and the back four were identical to when the championship was won in '91, though the full-backs drove forward less. Rioch's midfield featured the kind of pairing for which his predecessor was vilified, Ray Parlour and Martin Keown, and even David Platt's return would not provide the creativity Arsenal still lack.

Glenn Helder donned Anders Limpar's mercurial man-

de, playing a part in both goals in an otherwise fitful display. Up front, Ian Wright's partnership with Bergkamp looked equal to the one he enjoyed with Alan Smith, if only superficially.

Bergkamp's input was not that of a £7.5m player. Ugo Ehiogu's marking, as rigorous as in last year's UEFA Cup tie with Internazionale, revived doubts as to whether the Dutchman's languid style is suited to an out-and-out striker's role. Were he to drop deeper, however, he might duplicate Platt, who is shortly to test his recovery in the reserves, and

Brian Little's tactics would scarcely have allowed him any more room there.

Villa, who invariably had six men across midfield and nine behind the ball, had no ambition beyond avoiding defeat. Equally, for most of the first half, Arsenal had no idea how to find a way through. Yet their confidence did not dip, an improvement for which Rioch can take credit, while a crowd who may have become restless last winter roared encouragement.

Their reward, when it came, confirmed that the Goalkeep-

ers' Union must have voted to help Paul Merson's rehabilitation. The previous weekend, Leeds' John Lukic allowed the author of *Rock Bottom* to show he still has a nose for goal. This time Mark Bosnich's elementary error gifted Merson his second of the season.

Plan A scuppered, Villa resorted to a ragged alternative, though there was also an element of fortune about the goal that finished them off. Wright's misdirected effort, trickled in off the head of the prostrate Ehiogu in a manner that

reminded one of why they have also been called "Lucky Arsenal".

Rioch preferred the word "patient". No team of his would go "throwing themselves forward" — and when he decided such an approach as "Charge of the Light Brigade stuff" — it could have been George Graham talking.

Goals: Merson (47) 1-0; Wright (78) 2-0.
Arsenal (4-4-2): Seaman; Dixon, Adams, Bould, Whitehouse, Merson, Parlour, Watson, Helder, Bergkamp, Wright. Substitutes not used: Harrison, Jensen, Barmby (64).
Aston Villa (5-4-1): Bosnich; Chelvan, Ehiogu, McGovern, Fenton, 88, Southgate, A. Wright, Taylor, Dopson (Allicock, 62), Townsend, Stuarton (Johnson, 62), York. Referee: R. Hart (Derbyshire).

Depleted Wimbledon given dressing down in the ultimate couture clash

IAN POTTS

Newcastle United 6
Wimbledon 1

Like Tory governments, Wimbledon appear to have been around at the top forever, but on recent evidence both may be heading for a fall. A fifth successive League defeat for the Dons was bad enough, but a crippling injury list and the

dismissal of their last fit goalkeeper is enough to send anyone crazy.

"I don't know what else can happen to us," moaned manager Joe Kinnear, who now has 15 players unavailable. "Even without losing our keeper we were up against it, but the reason we didn't have another goal on the subs' bench was that the other two are injured."

So it was that captain calamitous Vinny Jones who chose to

go down with his ship, donning the green jersey to general amusement. Gaze might once have found his ball-handling pretty nifty, but that was seven years ago, and this is a different Newcastle United.

This was the ultimate couture clash: London's homeless ragamuffins against the Premier League's snappiest outfit. Yet for the first half-hour Wimbledon did as Wimbledon do, blocking off the avenues in

midfield and aiming balls high towards either post, where Newcastle can sometimes appear vulnerable. Within 34 minutes both full-backs had limped off, however, and Steve Howey's looping header shattered the illusion.

Four minutes later Ginola expertly set up Ferdinand's near-post finish. Having thus found the target for the seventh successive match, equalling the club's post-war record, the £6m

man bravely went full length to knock in another before the break. "Les spent all last week answering questions about why he wasn't playing for England," Kevin Keegan mused. "The last two Saturdays he's shown why he should be."

Goalkeeper Paul Heald — booked for time-wasting in the first-half — departed after needlessly upending Ferdinand early in the second, and Jones had no chance with Lee Clark's ris-

ing left-footer nor the flick which gave Ferdinand his first Newcastle hat-trick. Marcus Gayle's header brought brief respite, but substitute Philippe Albert steered in an exquisite sixth. Last season a disallowed goal in injury-time denied Wimbledon a draw on Tyneside. "The only difference between then and now is the £20m Kevin's had to spend," Kinnear noted. "I've had about 20 grand." It hardly seemed the time for chairman

Sam Hammam to renew his £1,000 wage with Newcastle counterpart Sir John Hall over which club will finish higher this season. Sometimes blind faith just isn't enough.

Goals: Howey (32) 1-0; Ferdinand (36) 2-0; Ferdinand (62) 3-0; Albert (69) 4-0; Gayle (74) 5-0; Ferdinand (82) 6-0.
Newcastle United (4-4-2): Heald; Barton, Howey, Ginola, 83, Wright, Richardson, Lee (Gallagher, 80), Clark (Prestidge, 80), Ginola, Ferdinand.
Wimbledon (4-4-2): Perry (Dixonson, 34); Louchard, 68, Fitzgerald, Pearson, McGovern (Roby, 12); Cunningham, Jones, Clark, Gayle; Helder, Hart. Referee: G. Poll (Derby).

Why Keegan puts his trust in the Green grass of home

It all looks so easy, doesn't it, the business of winning the Premiership; you just buy the best centre-forward in the country, fix him up with a couple of fast wingers, then sit back and watch it happen.

But there is much more planning than that behind Newcastle's off-kilter-a-train start. Kevin Keegan may come across as an easy-going, win-some-lose-some, ever-so-sporting kind of chap... but the facade masks meticulous attention to detail, right down to the length of the grass on the £400,000 St James' Park pitch.

Head groundsman George

Green worked for six managers in 14 years from Bill McGarry to Ossie Ardiles, before Keegan came along. To most of them, it seemed a pitch — but not for Kevin.

"He takes much more interest than any of the others did and discusses what he wants," Green says. Essentially, so his close-passing game can work to maximum efficiency, that means "nice and short and a little bit slick on top".

So there you have it. For sure, Ginola's feet and Ferdinand's head are key weapons in the Tyne-side armoury — but so, too, is George Green's mower.

That was the weekend that was

by Jon Culley

'Yellow fever' grips Boro

No Juninho yet at Middlesbrough's imposing Riverside Stadium — but the lively trade in Brazilian shirts, scarves and green and yellow face paint witnessed on Saturday bore testimony to the way Juninho fever has seeped into its grip. The club's sales staff are facing an explosion of business, the limits of which they cannot predict. "We are geared up to meet the demand but, commercially speaking, we are into a league we've not been near before," commercial director Graham Fordy said. "Last week, Umbro recalled hundreds of replica Brazil shirts and sent them here — their entire United Kingdom stock. We sold the lot," he added. "We've now taken delivery of more than a thousand replica shirts from the 1970s."

Shock waves are being felt even in Italy, where kit manufacturers Errea have their Parma factory working non-stop to meet the demand for Juninho's No 25 shirt.

Premier XI

WIMBLEDON
WEST HAM
COX (MID) VICKERS (MID) COOPER (F) MARTIN (NEWCASTLE)
SINCLAIR (Q) SCHMEICHEL (MAN UTD) STEVENSON (CENT) GINOLA (ARSENAL)
DOPPEL (WEST HAM) FERDINAND (NEWCASTLE)

Cheered by howling Wolves

Given that nothing cheers a West Bromwich fan more than to mock a Wolves team in trouble, it is a good time to be a Wolves fan in the Black Country. Andy Hunt's last-gasp penalty against Portsmouth kept Albion in second spot in the Football League First Division — 14 places above Wolves' struggling troops. Saturday's match marked the completion of a remarkable 12 months in charge for manager Stan Buckley, who took over a team that was reeling off last October, even then Wolves are now 12 places from bottom with just two wins in 12 games. Since then Buckley, who steered Gillingham to promotion two years in a row, has turned a career of relegation candidates into one with genuine play-off prospects. What is more, while Graham Taylor has been reducing Sir Jack Hayward's fortune in multiples of £1m, Buckley has spent £375,000 — in total.



Fact and fiction from the Sunday papers

Turn back the clock

Julian Dicks may feel aggrieved at his punishment over the John Spencer incident — but October has often been a bad month in which to fall foul of the authorities. The West Ham full back, still on a mere nine career dismissals (plus 54 cautions) after keeping his head down on Saturday, might count himself lucky not to

have been offending officials for a quarter of a century ago. In October 1969, Graham Rathbone, of Grimsby, and Southampton's Don Welbourne were each banned for eight weeks after being sent off for fighting. Later the same month, the Football Association suspended Derek Dougan of Wolves for the same period. It marked the start of a clamp-down on violence that re-emerged the following October when Dicks' fellow Hammer, Billy Bonds, was banned for five weeks.

Red card

Middlesbrough... for entering the FA Carling Premiership with a spanking new, built-in-eight-months 30,000-seat stadium set among vast acres of deserted dockland — and a patchy 400 permits-only parking spaces. Sorry, but it cannot be bouquets all the way...

We are not in the position we should be in. We should be high up in the league, but there are certain things out of a manager's control.

Graham Taylor, the beleaguered manager of Wolves, after Saturday's improved performance at Watford brought only a point.

Take a bow

Stanford Rangers... who let a 2-0 lead slip against Halesowen Town in the Beazer Homes League Premier Division but held on for a first point in 12 games, ending the last remaining 100 per cent losing record in the senior English leagues. Helped to Kevin Bowers, Rangers' yard manager of the season.

Removers

Leeds manager Howard Wilkinson is ready to respond to the latest Elard Road crisis with a £4.5m move for in-form Queen's Park Rangers winger Trevor Sinclair, according to the *News of the World*, which claims that Wilkinson is ready to offload David White, Rod Wallace, and Phil Masing to raise cash. The same paper suggests that Arsenal and Manchester United are rivals in a £2m chase for Auzene mid-fielder Constantin Mireles. The *Mail on Sunday* names Dennis Goodie as a candidate for the FA's new £130,000-a-year post of technical director, replacing Howard Wilkinson as the top English-born contender, with former Scotland coach Andy Roxburgh and the Frenchman, Gerard Houllier, as outside possibilities. Middlesbrough's signing of Juninho could be under threat, according to the *People*, which claims that the FA is looking into the possible involvement of unlicensed agents in the £4.75m transfer. The same paper says that Bryan Robson's hopes of forming a Brazilian double act with Juninho's São Paulo teammate Cello will fail because the latter's status does not qualify him for a work permit. The *Sunday Express* links Sheffield Wednesday with a £1.3m move for Luton's Scott Oakes.

صلى الله عليه وسلم

